半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

VOLUME 2

SAND AND FLOWER

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

Lifelong Friends, with the Same Dreams,
Striving to Grow into a Rising River.

story
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GOSEKI KOJIMA

®
DARK HORSE MANGA™

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半蔵の門

SAND AND FLOWER

by KAZUO KOIKE
& GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME

2

"Now that I've disclosed my thoughts . . . you're dead. But I change my mind."

Motonobu marries Tsukiyama-*dono*, a daughter of Sekiguchi Yoshihiro, the key vassal of Imagawa Yoshimoto. After the birth of his daughter, Motonobu is given permission to go back to Mikawa for a short visit. However, this permission turns out to be a terrible scheme by Imagawa Yoshimoto to discover the workings of Motonobu's mind. Imagawa Yoshimoto means to kill Motonobu if Motonobu does not return to Sunpu after the visit. Will Motonobu defect from Imagawa and stay in Mikawa, or will he go back to Sunpu and remain there as a hostage . . . ? And what is on Hanzō's mind as he watches Motonobu make the decision?

半蔵の門 PATH OF THE ASSASSIN

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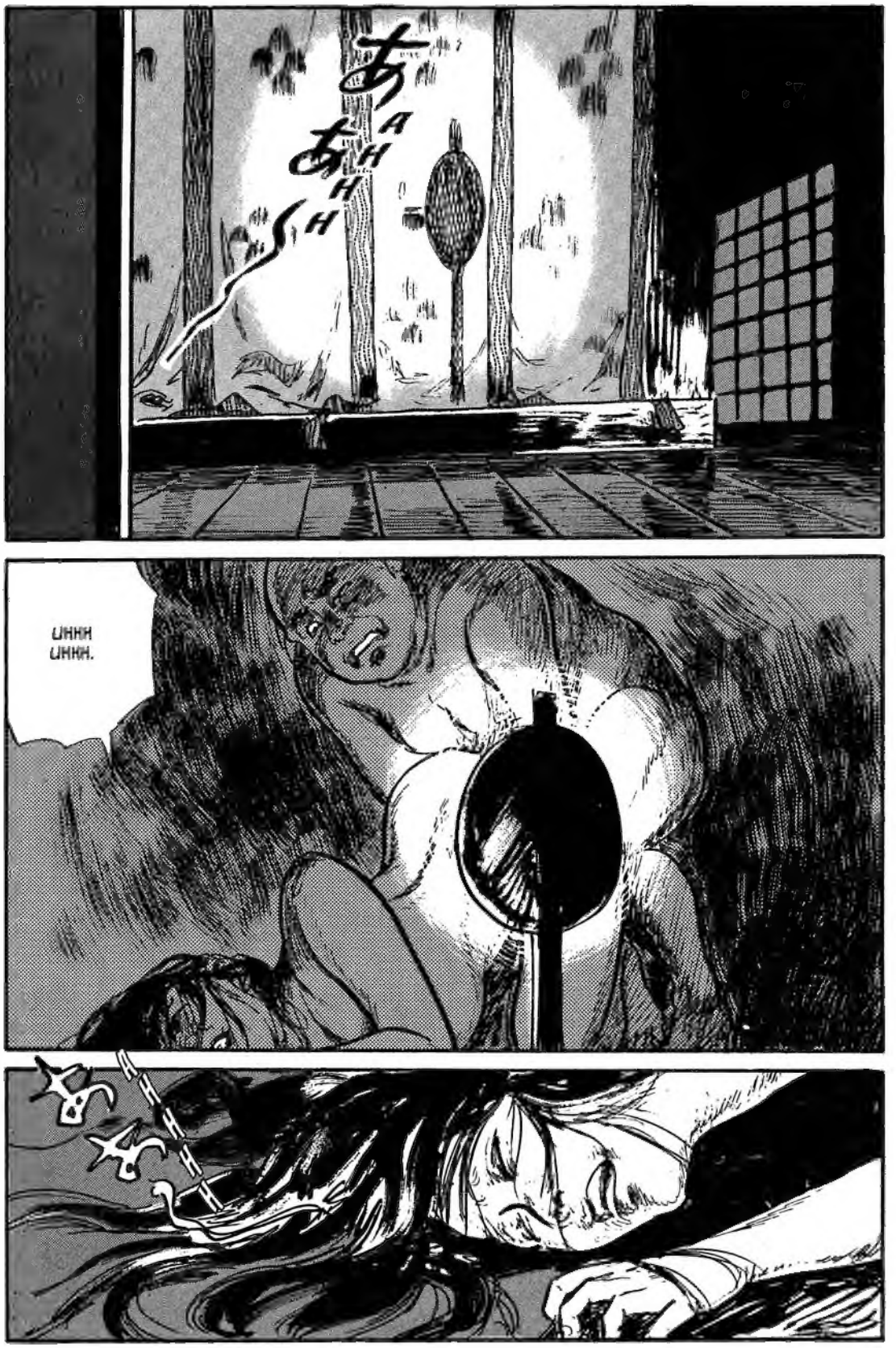
Chapter On Relinquishing Pain

No. 8: Neyasu Samehan


AAHHHH
UHHH
UHHH.
HHHH

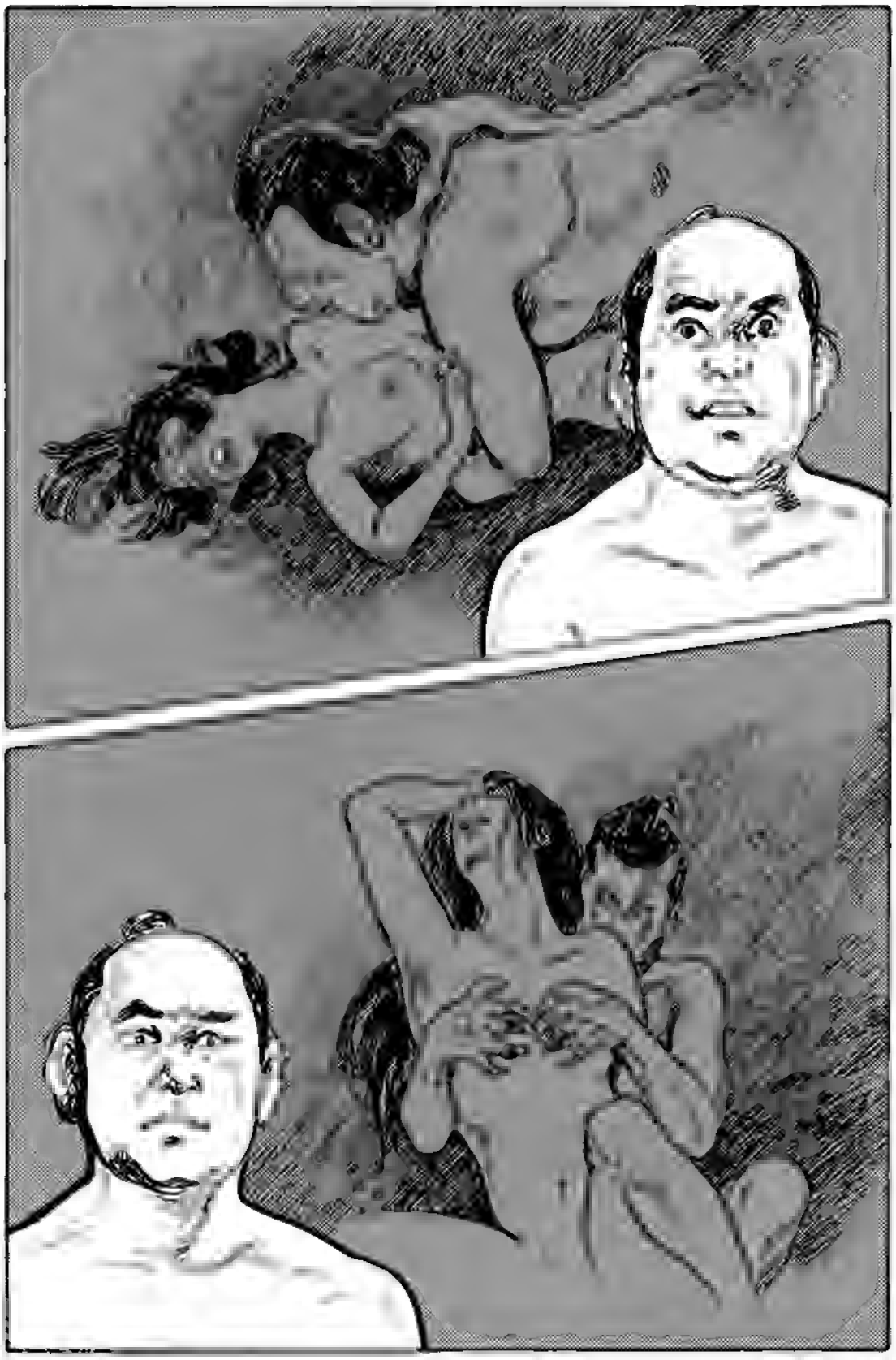
MORE.
HAAA

DON'T YOU EVER GET ENOUGH?
MORE. MORE. YOU *NEVER* STOP ASKING FOR MORE.
JUST A LITTLE MORE.

...WANT MORE.
IT MUST BE UJIZANE... WHO MADE YOU...
BECAUSE YOU'VE LAIN WITH A LEFT-HANDED MAN, YOU ALWAYS SLEEP ON MY RIGHT. THAT PROVES IT MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE.
ANSWER ME.

NO.
IF IT'S WITH UJIZANE, YOU DON'T WANT MORE?
AND IT'S UNREASONABLE TO ASK A FLOWER TO BE CHASTE.
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO ASK A DOLL TO HAVE A HEART.
Y--YOU! H--HOW DARE YOU SAY SUCH...

AND WHEN PLUCKED, A FLOWER MUST SUBMIT.
IN THIS TIME OF WARRING STATES, THE DAUGHTERS OF SAMURAI ARE NOTHING BUT POLITICAL TOOLS. WE CANNOT LIVE THE WAY WE DESIRE.
IT WAS OYAKATA-SAMA WHO PLUCKED ME.
SAYING NO CAN'T HELP A BLOSSOM ESCAPE.
AND IT'S YOU WHO ARRANGED ME.
IT WAS UJIZANE-SAMA WHO ADMIRED ME.



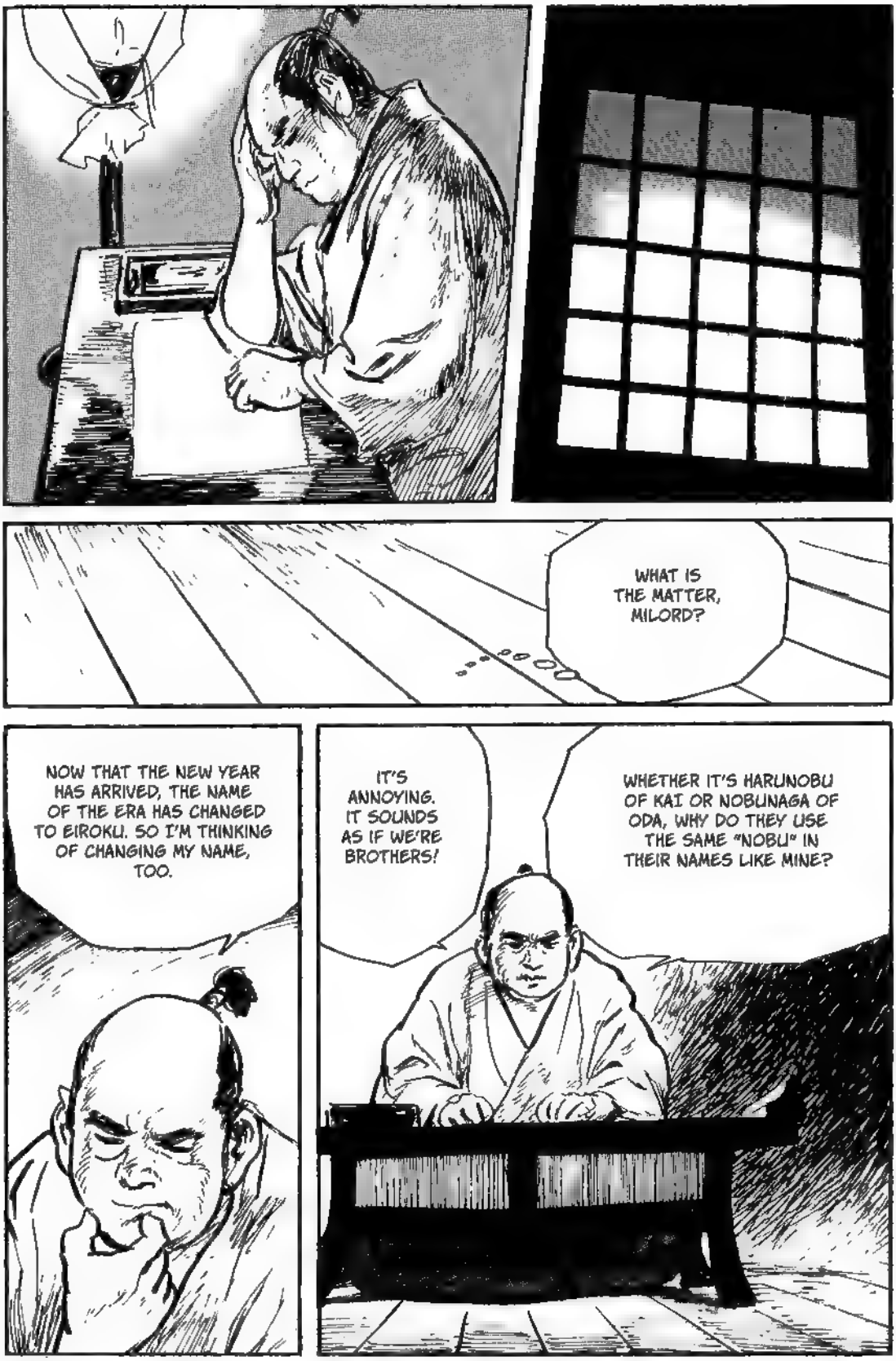
HM...
AND WHO KNOWS IN WHOSE SLEEPING QUARTERS I MAY WITHER.
URK...
FRANKLY, I DON'T LIKE ANY OF YOU.
I'M NOT ATTRACTED TO OYAKATA-SAMA, NOR UJIZANE-SAMA, NOR YOU.

ULP!
I CAN'T ORGASM BECAUSE I HAVEN'T OPENED MY HEART.
BLEHH!
OH UH!
EHHHHH!
EHHH!

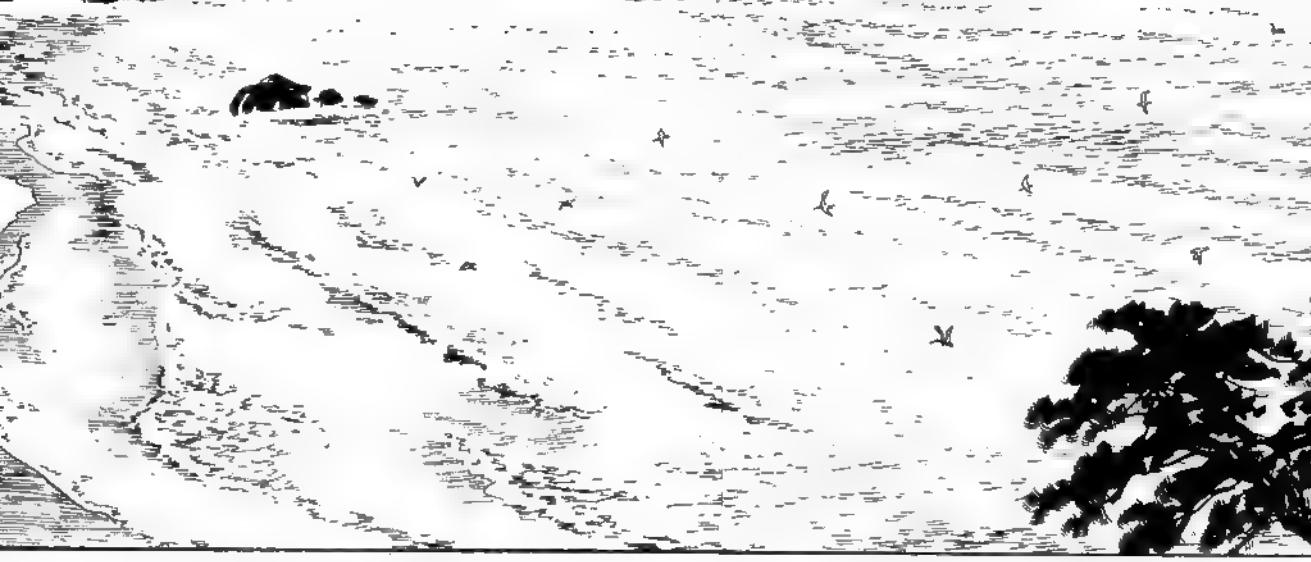
WHOSE...?
ARE YOU... CARRYING A BABY...?
HUFF
HUFF
FROM WHAT YOU SAID, I CAN SEE HOW THINGS ARE...
EVEN THOUGH I'M A MAN... I'M A SAMURAI KEPT HOSTAGE WITH NO FREEDOM AND NO HOME...
EHHHH

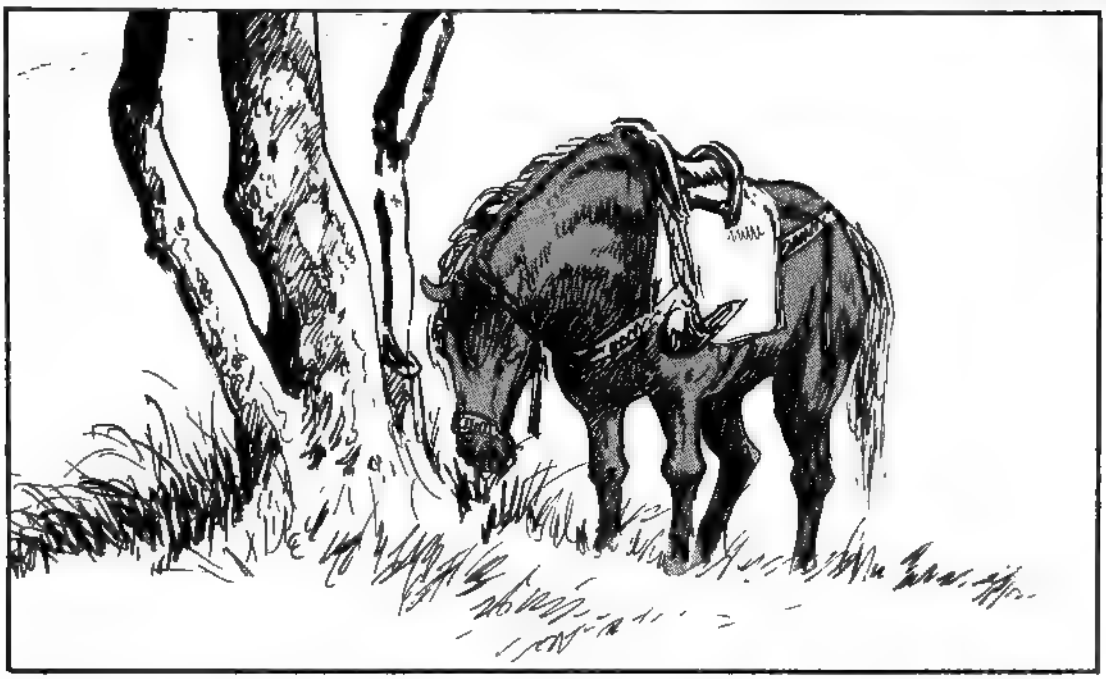
SSHHH

IT SOUNDS AS IF WE ALL CAME OUT OF THE SAME BELLY.
元信 信長 信虎 晴信
MOTONOBU NOBUNAGA
NOBUTORA HARUNOBU


WHAT IS THE MATTER, MILORD?
NOW THAT THE NEW YEAR HAS ARRIVED, THE NAME OF THE ERA HAS CHANGED TO EIROKU. SO I'M THINKING OF CHANGING MY NAME, TOO.
IT'S ANNOYING. IT SOUNDS AS IF WE'RE BROTHERS!
WHETHER IT'S HARUNOBU OF KAI OR NOBUNAGA OF ODA, WHY DO THEY USE THE SAME "NOBU" IN THEIR NAMES LIKE MINE?

ARE YOU TAKING "YASU" FROM YOUR GRANDFATHER, KIYOYASU-SAMA?
HM, HOW ABOUT MOTOYASU?
YASU
NO.
WHAT?!
"YASU" COMES FROM MY DESIRE TO RELAX IN PEACE AND ENJOY MY LIFE ON EARTH INSTEAD OF FIGHTING.

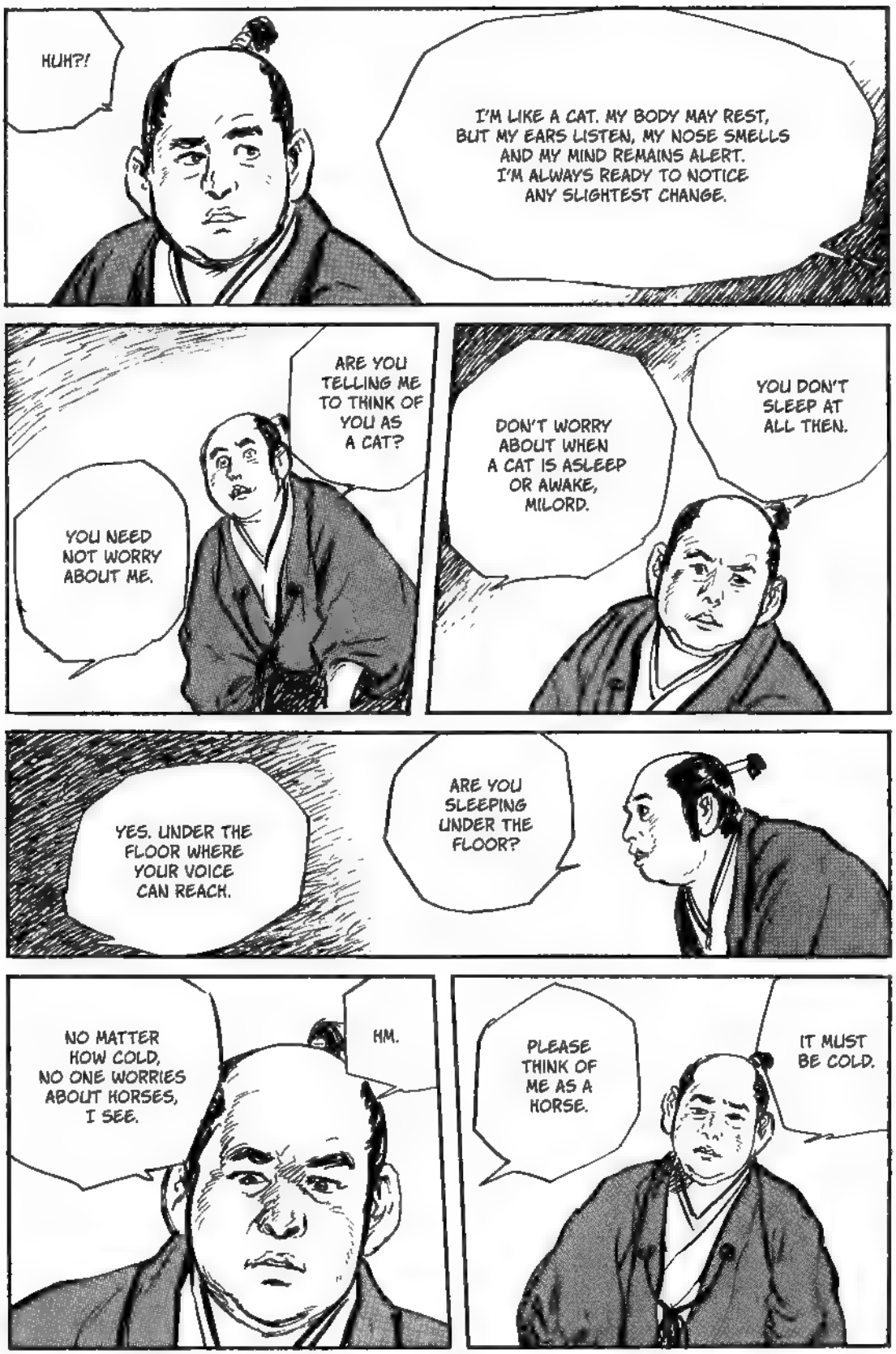




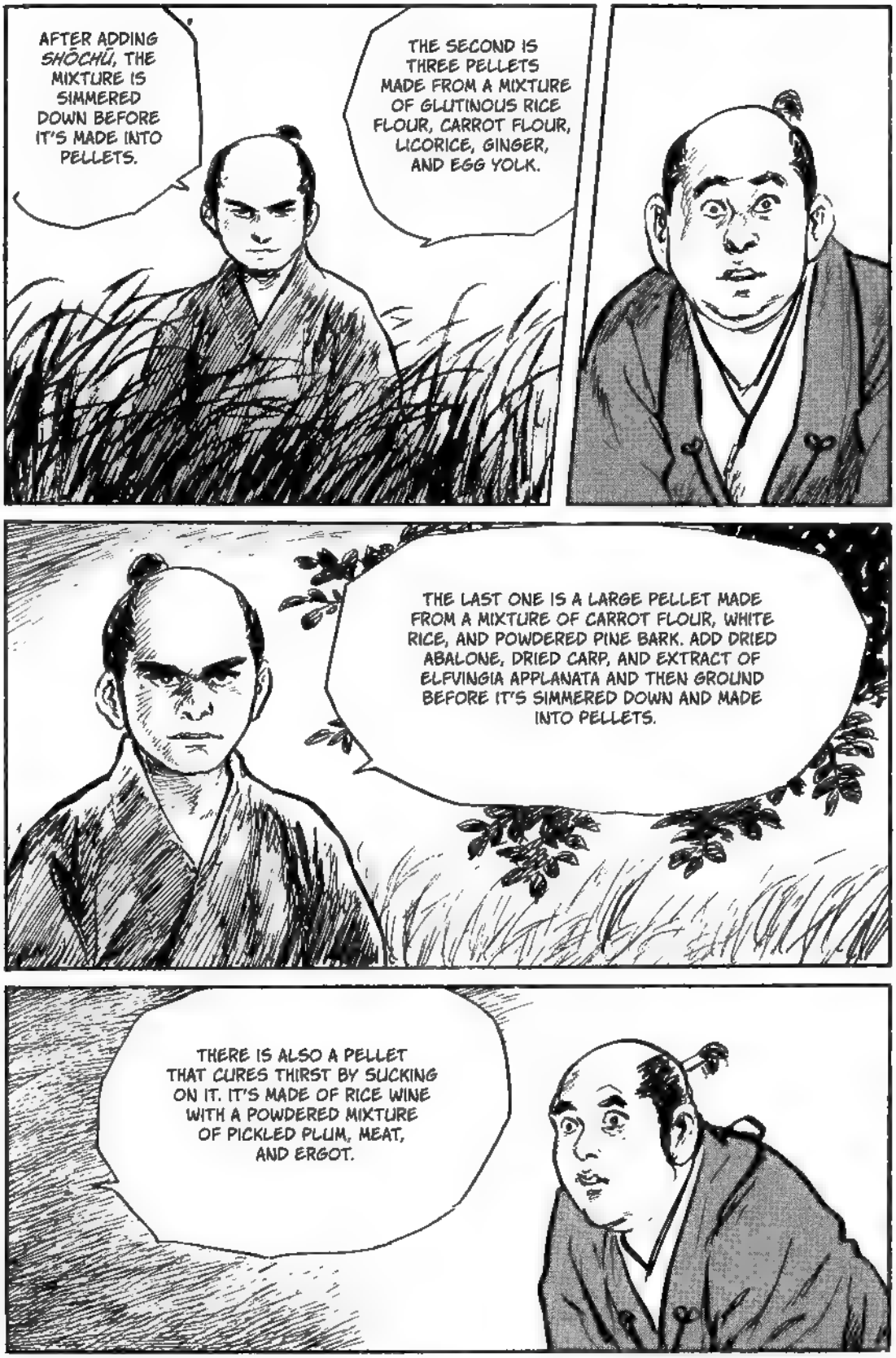
KOU

I WISH I COULD LIVE MY LIFE IN QUIET IDLENESS.
LIKE THE TRANQUIL OCEAN.

YES?
BY THE WAY, HANZŌ.
WHAT?!
I SLEEP ALL DAY LONG.
WHEN DO YOU SLEEP?
?!
BUT I'M ALWAYS AWAKE.


HUH?!
I'M LIKE A CAT. MY BODY MAY REST, BUT MY EARS LISTEN, MY NOSE SMELLS AND MY MIND REMAINS ALERT. I'M ALWAYS READY TO NOTICE ANY SLIGHTEST CHANGE.
ARE YOU TELLING ME TO THINK OF YOU AS A CAT?
YOU NEED NOT WORRY ABOUT ME.
YOU DON'T SLEEP AT ALL THEN.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT WHEN A CAT IS ASLEEP OR AWAKE, MILORD.
ARE YOU SLEEPING UNDER THE FLOOR?
YES. UNDER THE FLOOR WHERE YOUR VOICE CAN REACH.
HM.
NO MATTER HOW COLD, NO ONE WORRIES ABOUT HORSES, I SEE.
IT MUST BE COLD.
PLEASE THINK OF ME AS A HORSE.

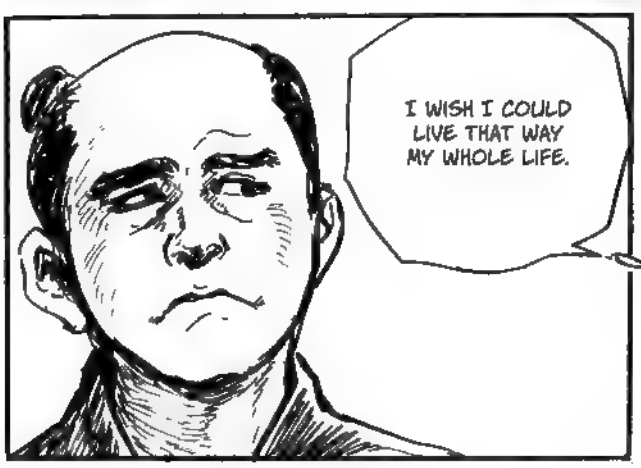
BUT THAT WON'T DO. YOU ARE NOT A CAT OR A HORSE. I KNOW HOW YOU SUFFER.
THERE ARE THREE THINGS I EAT EVERY DAY. FIRST IS FIVE PELLETS MADE BY SIMMERING DOWN RICE WINE, HONEY, AND A MIXTURE OF WHEAT, RICE, AND CARROT FLOURS.
AND WHAT DO YOU EAT?!

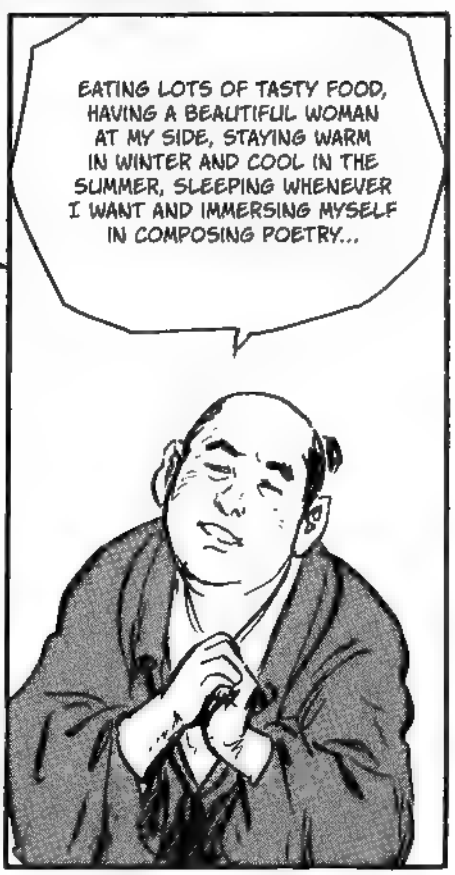

AFTER ADDING SHŌCHŪ, THE MIXTURE IS SIMMERED DOWN BEFORE IT'S MADE INTO PELLETS.
THE SECOND IS THREE PELLETS MADE FROM A MIXTURE OF GLUTINOUS RICE FLOUR, CARROT FLOUR, LICORICE, GINGER, AND EGG YOLK.
THE LAST ONE IS A LARGE PELLET MADE FROM A MIXTURE OF CARROT FLOUR, WHITE RICE, AND POWDERED PINE BARK. ADD DRIED ABALONE, DRIED CARP, AND EXTRACT OF ELFVINGIA APPLANATA AND THEN GROUND BEFORE IT'S SIMMERED DOWN AND MADE INTO PELLETS.
THERE IS ALSO A PELLET THAT CURES THIRST BY SUCKING ON IT. IT'S MADE OF RICE WINE WITH A POWDERED MIXTURE OF PICKLED PLUM, MEAT, AND ERGOT.

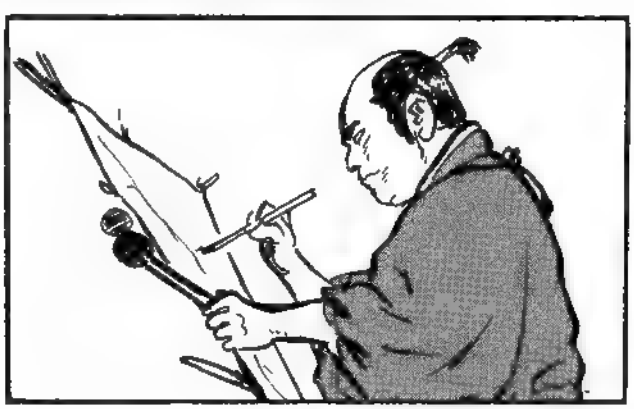
IF THE THIRST ISN'T CURED BY IT, THERE'S ANOTHER ONE. IT'S A MIXTURE OF LICORICE, MINT, ARROWROOT POWDER, SALTED PLUM, SMOKED PLUM, AND *HE SHOU WU*. AFTER THE MIXTURE IS POWDERED AND KNEADED, IT IS MADE INTO LITTLE BALLS.
BY EATING THREE A DAY, A MAN CAN GO WITHOUT WATER FOR ABOUT FOUR DAYS.
I SENSE SOMEONE NEARBY. I THINK IT'S A FISHERMAN. I'D BETTER NOT BE SEEN.
LET ME TRY ONE! ANY OF THEM WILL DO.
I'M AFRAID I MUST ASK YOU TO OPEN YOUR MOUTH WIDE.

OH!
HM!

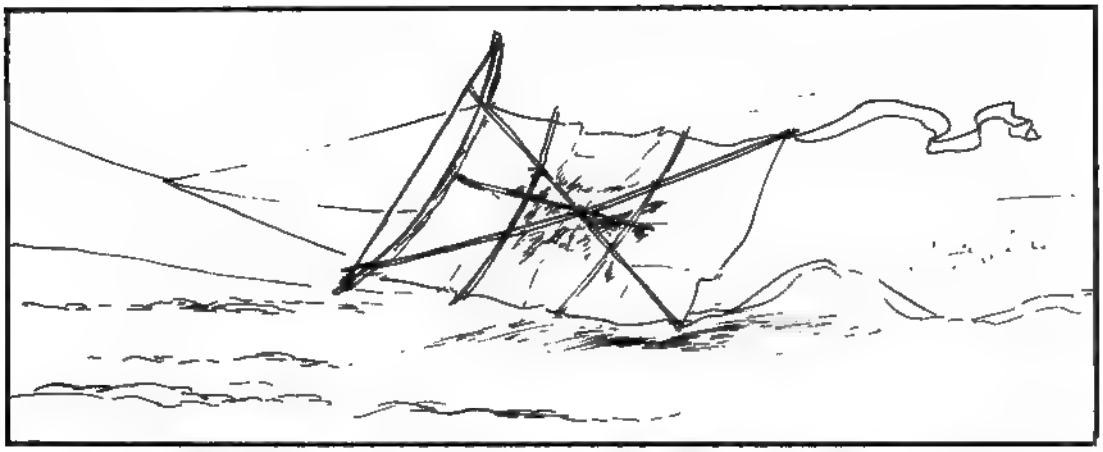
PARDON ME.
WHAT A... DISGUSTING FLAVOR.

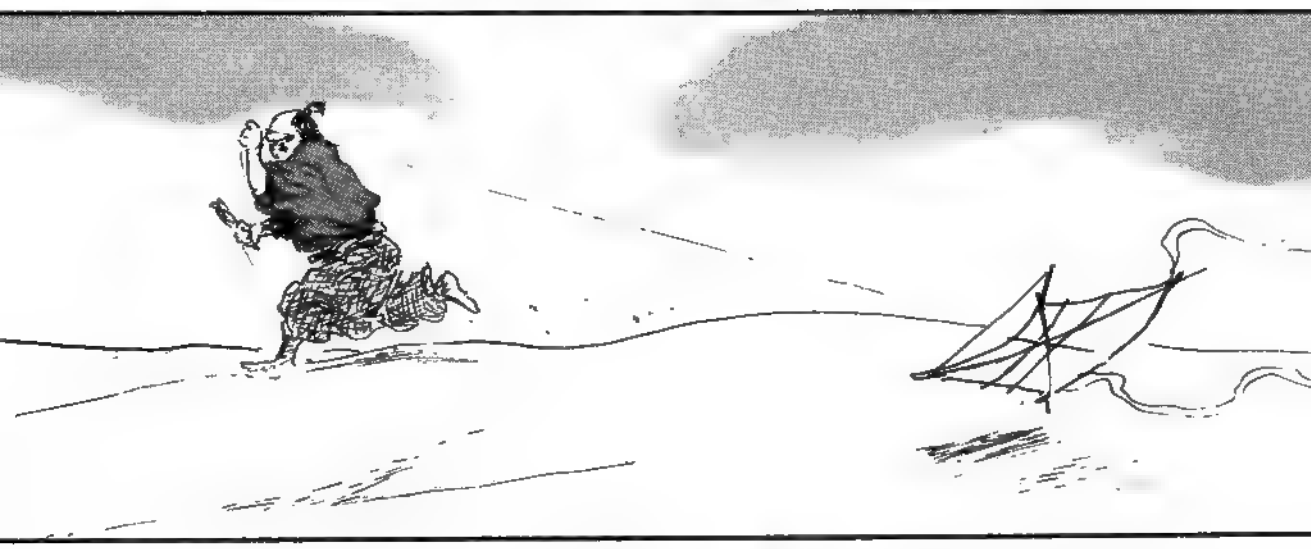

I WISH I COULD LIVE THAT WAY MY WHOLE LIFE.

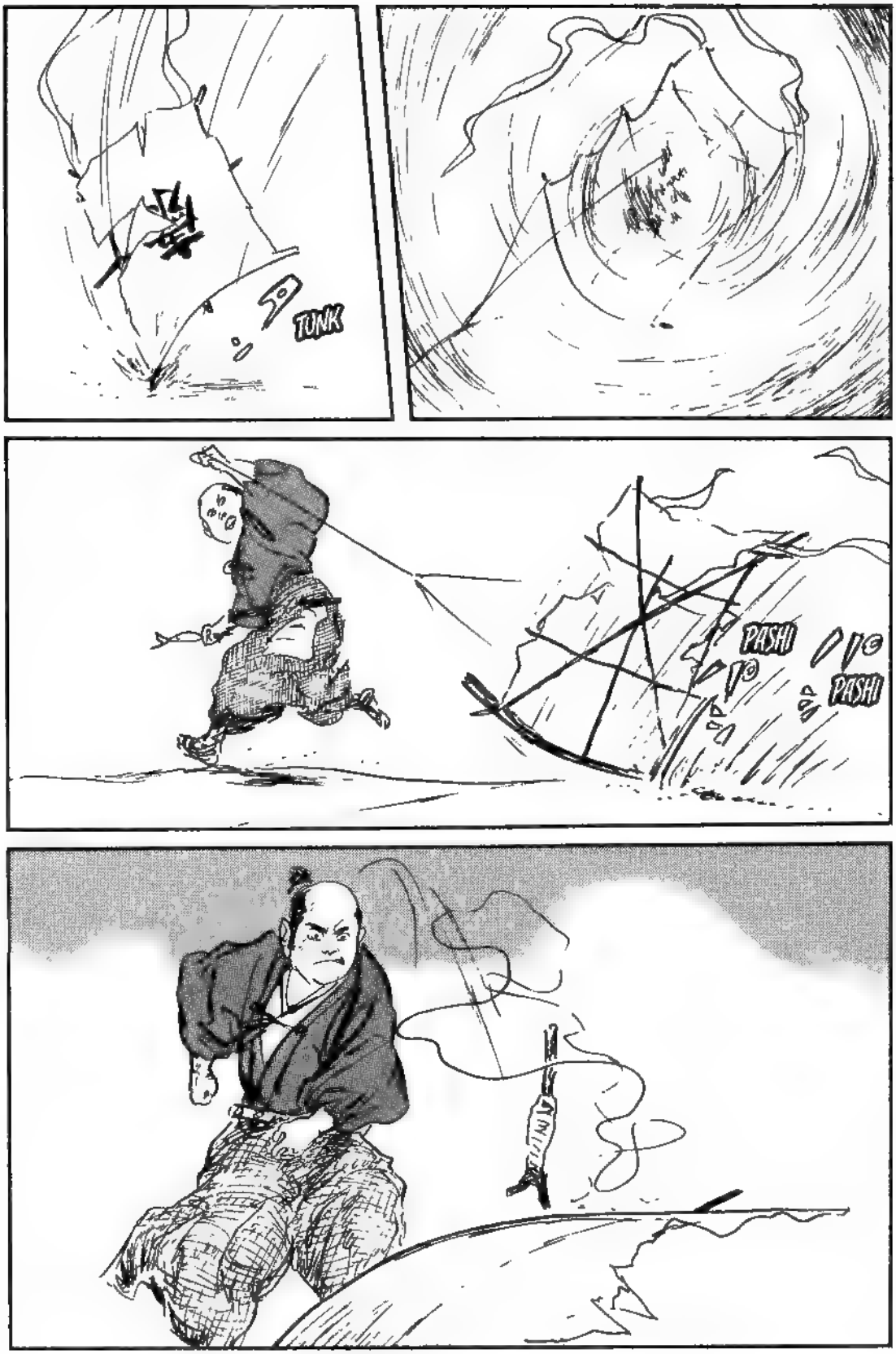

EATING LOTS OF TASTY FOOD, HAVING A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN AT MY SIDE, STAYING WARM IN WINTER AND COOL IN THE SUMMER, SLEEPING WHENEVER I WANT AND IMMERSING MYSELF IN COMPOSING POETRY...



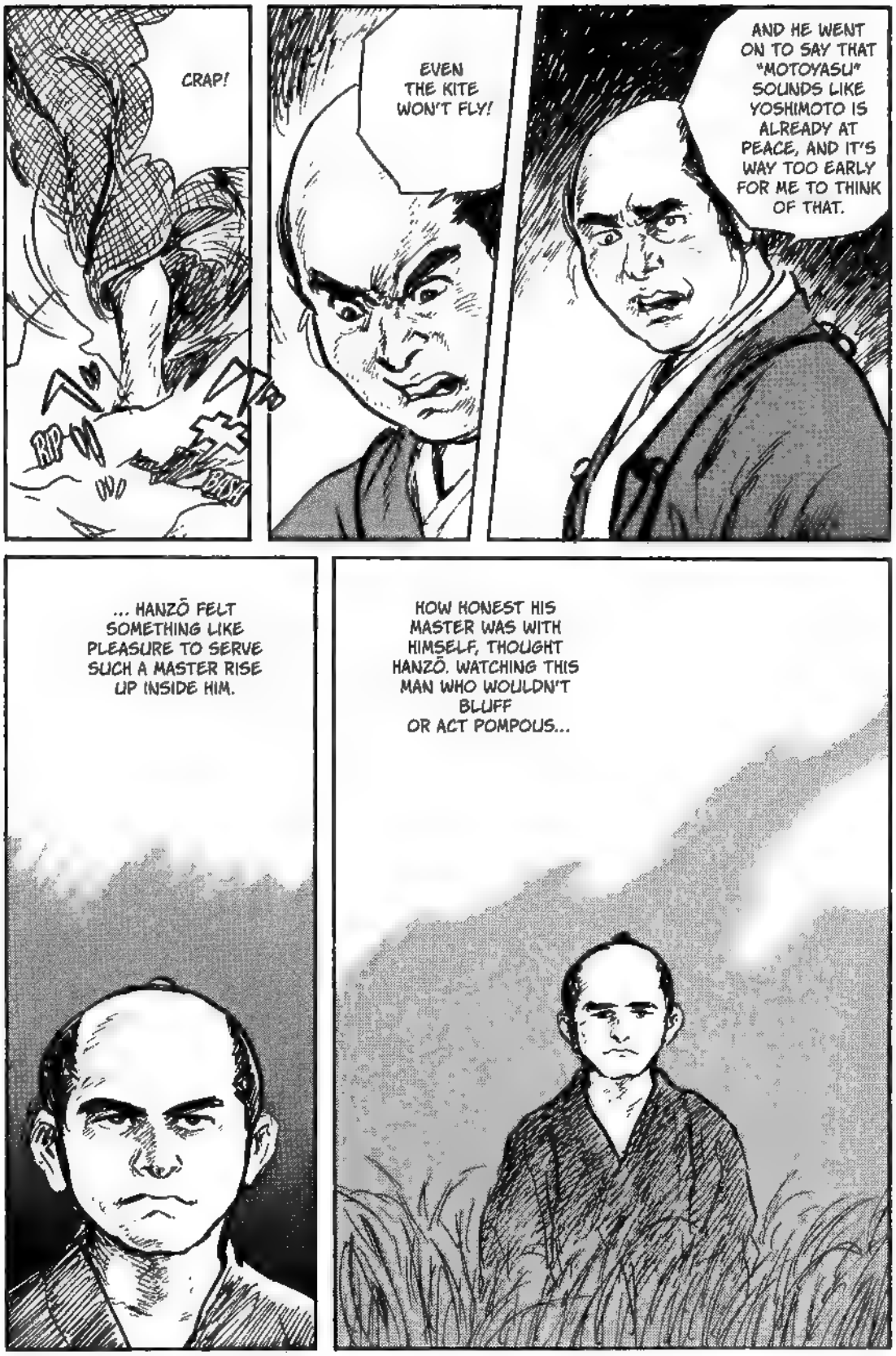
YASU
I WANTED TO HAVE "YASU" AS PART OF MY NAME SO THAT MY WISH MIGHT COME TRUE...



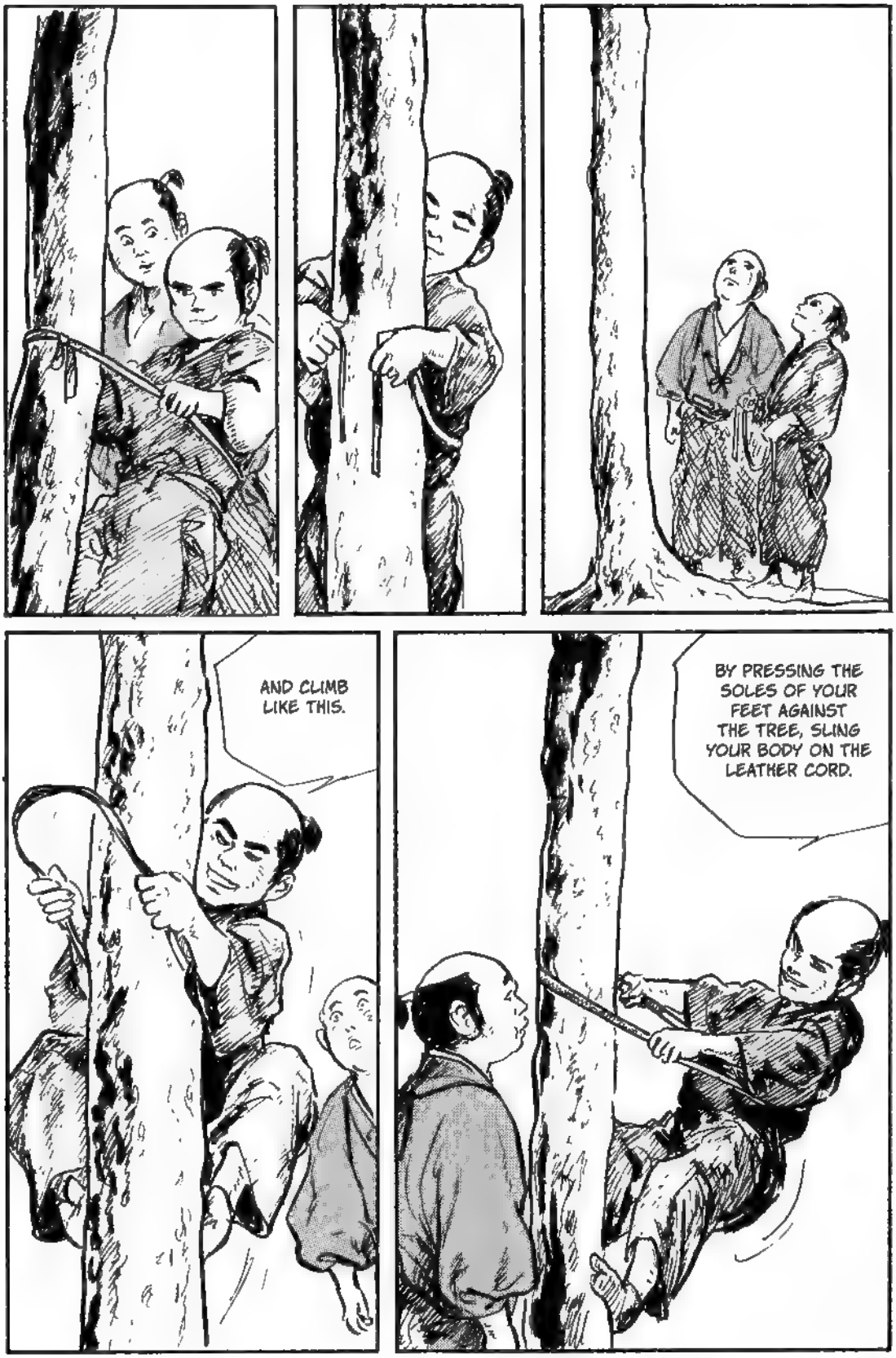


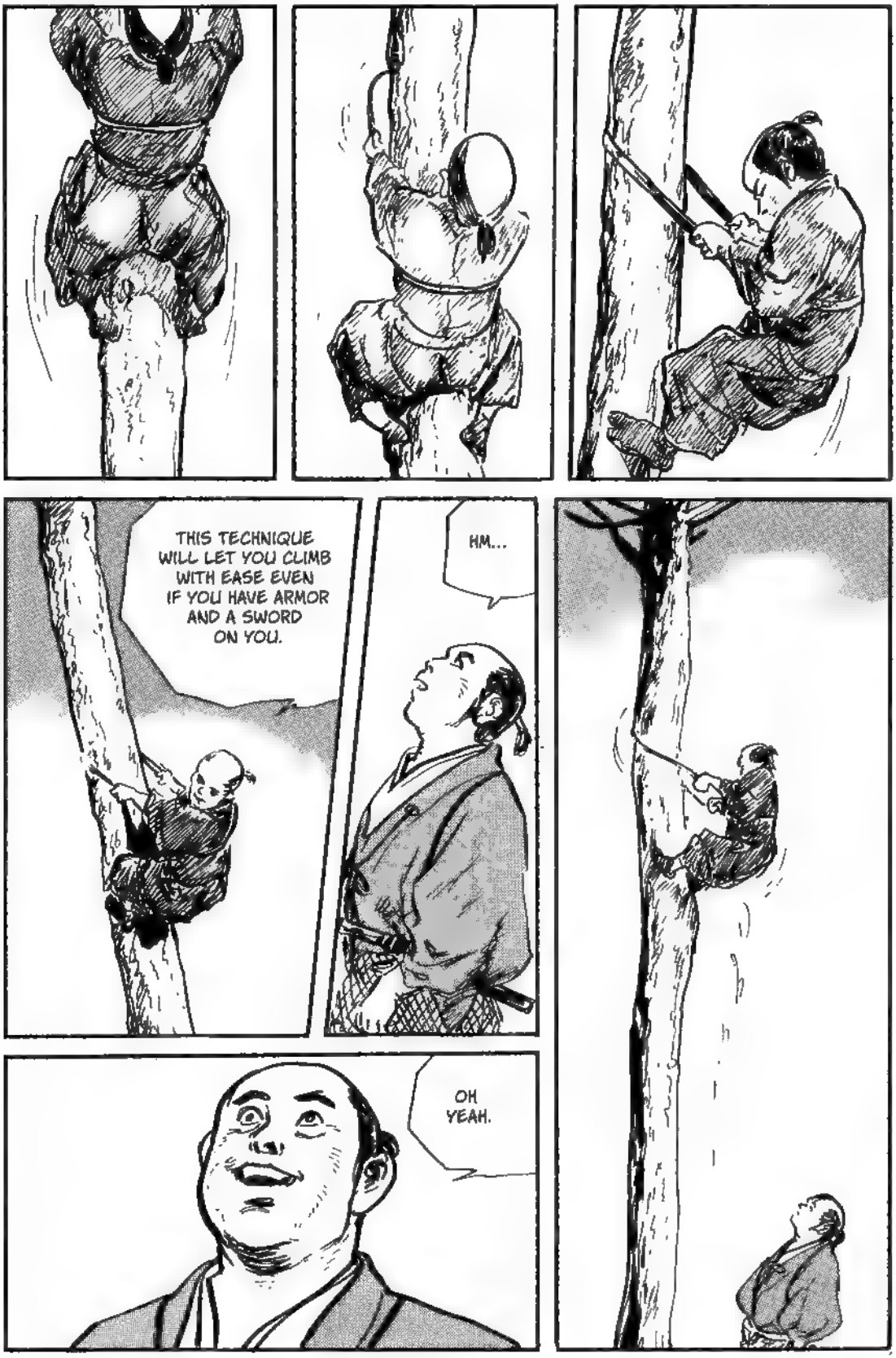

TUNK
PASHI
PASHI

I KNEW MY WISH WOULD NEVER FLY.
OKAII! FLATLY REFUSED MY REQUEST TO CHANGE MY NAME.
HE SAYS MOTONOBU COMES FROM TRUSTING IN YOSHIMOTO, AND I SHOULD BE CONTENT
BASH!

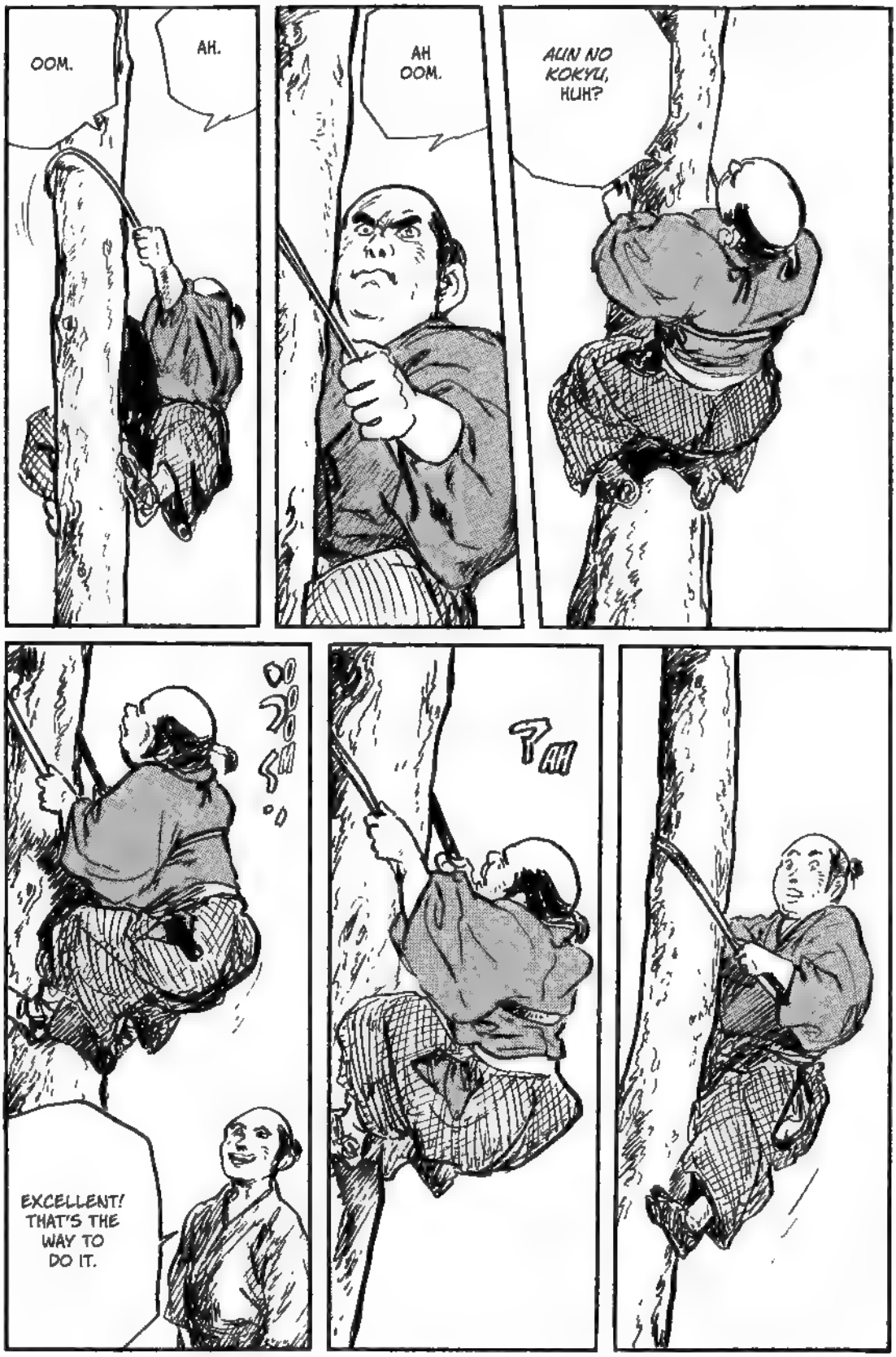

CRAP!
RIP
BASH
EVEN THE KITE WON'T FLY!
AND HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT "MOTOYASU" SOUNDS LIKE YOSHIMOTO IS ALREADY AT PEACE, AND IT'S WAY TOO EARLY FOR ME TO THINK OF THAT.
... HANZŌ FELT SOMETHING LIKE PLEASURE TO SERVE SUCH A MASTER RISE UP INSIDE HIM.
HOW HONEST HIS MASTER WAS WITH HIMSELF, THOUGHT HANZŌ. WATCHING THIS MAN WHO WOULDN'T BLUFF OR ACT POMPOUS...

HANZŌ.
YES?
NO, SIR.
DO YOU SENSE ANYONE AROUND?
YES, SIR.
A TECHNIQUE TO CLIMB AS FAST AND AS EASILY AS POSSIBLE.
CAN YOU TEACH ME HOW TO CLIMB A TREE?

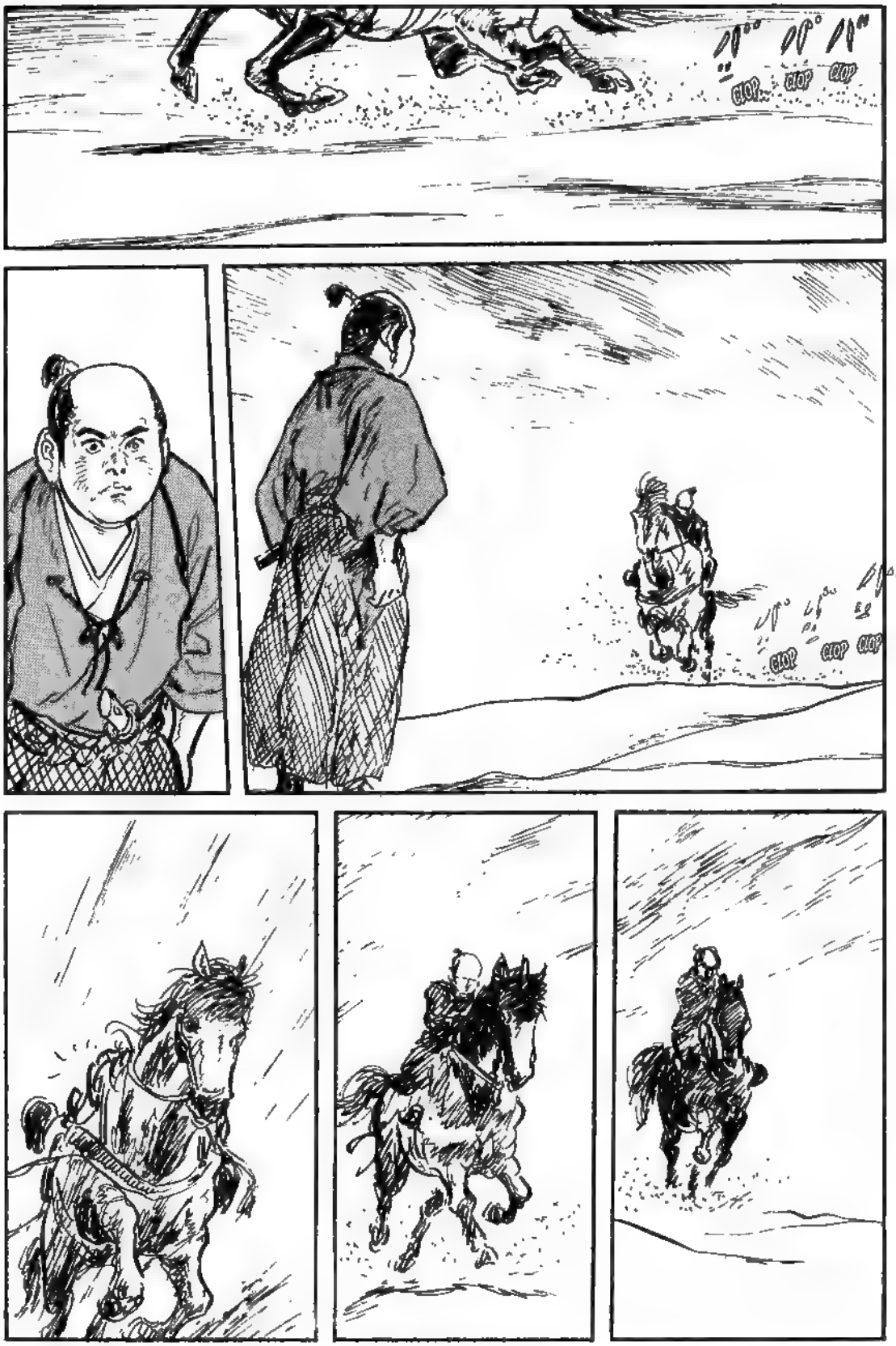

AND CLIMB LIKE THIS.
BY PRESSING THE SOLES OF YOUR FEET AGAINST THE TREE, SLING YOUR BODY ON THE LEATHER CORD.

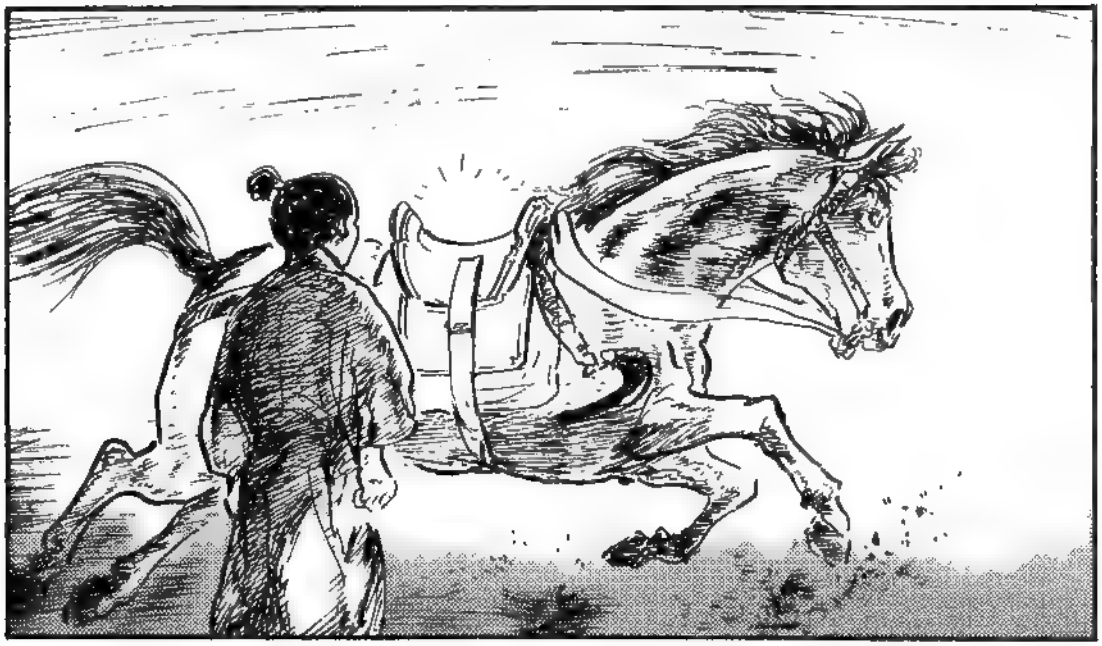

THIS TECHNIQUE WILL LET YOU CLIMB WITH EASE EVEN IF YOU HAVE ARMOR AND A SWORD ON YOU.
HM...
OH YEAH.

THIS IS PRECISELY WHAT *AUN NO KOKYU* IS ABOUT.
MMMG.
RELEASE THE TENSION FOR A MOMENT, LEAVING THE CORD TO SAG, AND QUICKLY HOIST YOURSELF UP.


OOM.
AH.
AH
OOM.
A-UN NO
KOKYU,
HUH?
EXCELLENT!
THAT'S THE
WAY TO
DO IT.

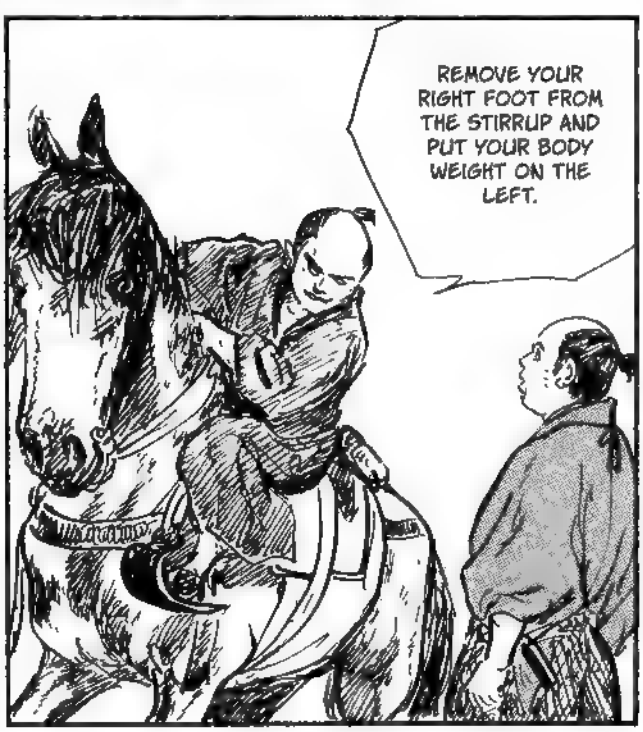
WHOA.
ZURU
HA HA HA
HA HA HA
HA HA.
IT'S EASY.
AH
OOM.
AH
OOM.
HEH HA
HA HA HA
HEE HEE
HEE HEE.


CLOP...
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP

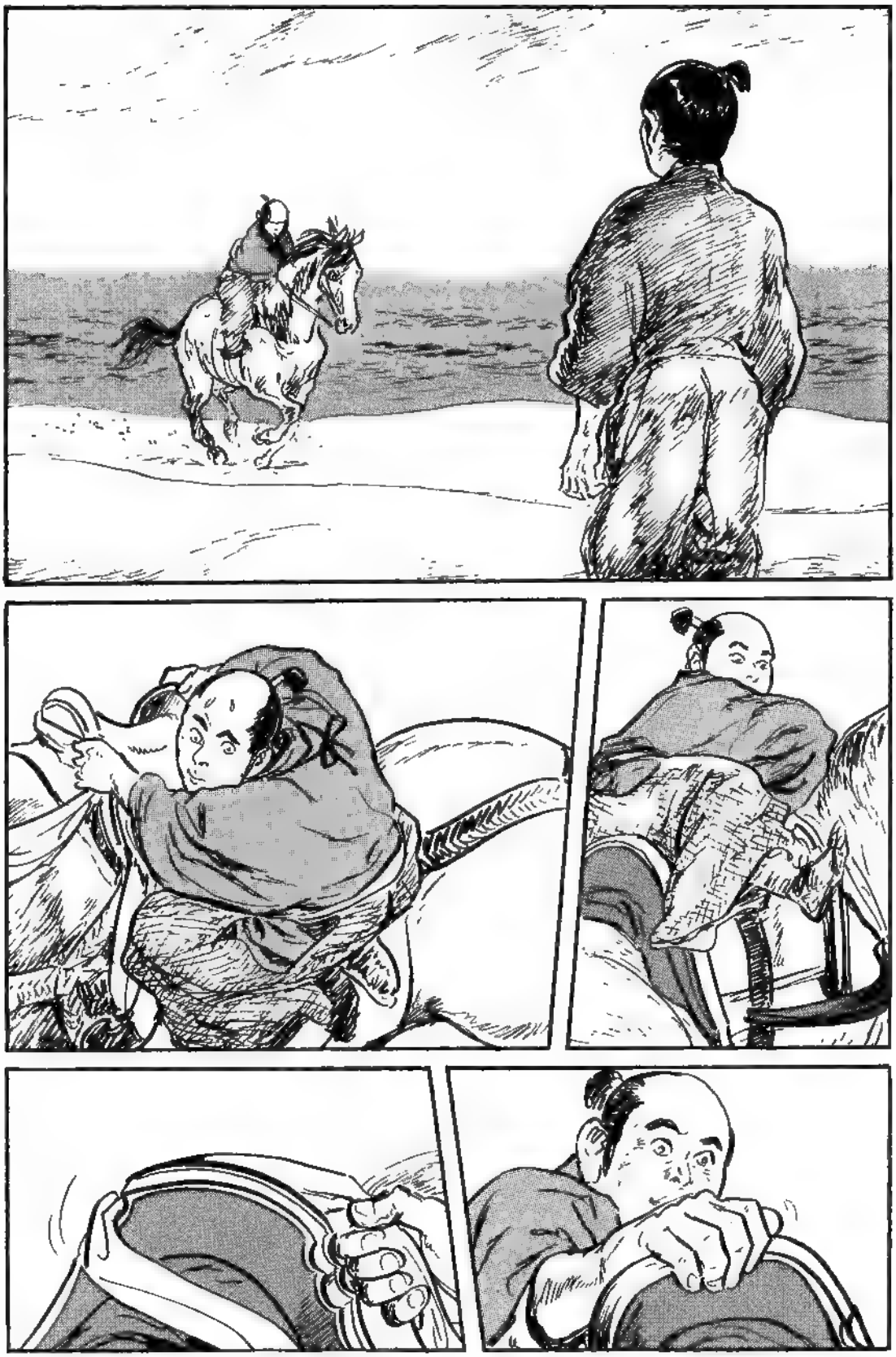


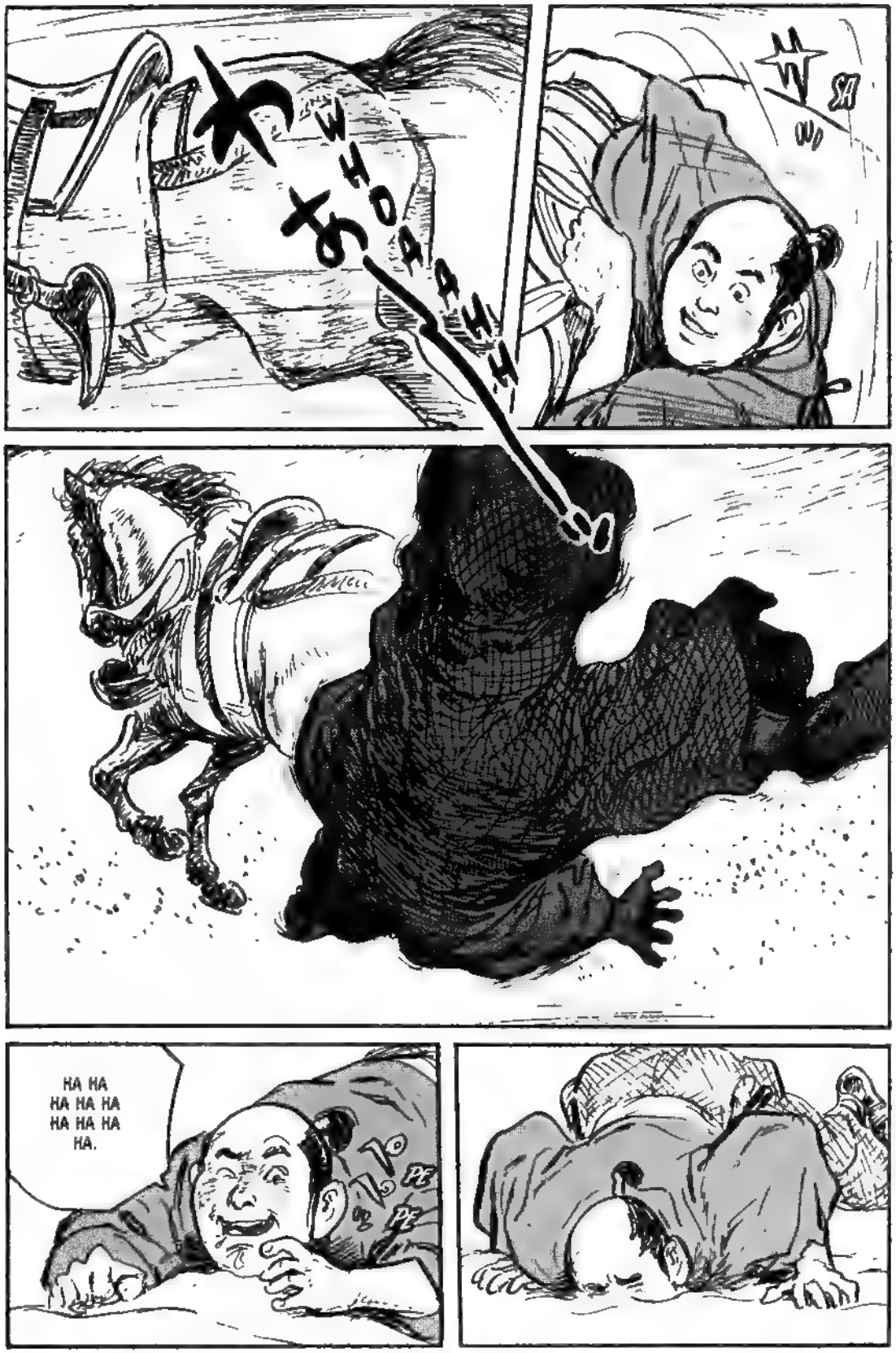
!?

GUIDING THE HORSE WITH YOUR LEFT HAND, SECURE THE SADDLE WITH YOUR RIGHT ON THE CANTLE.

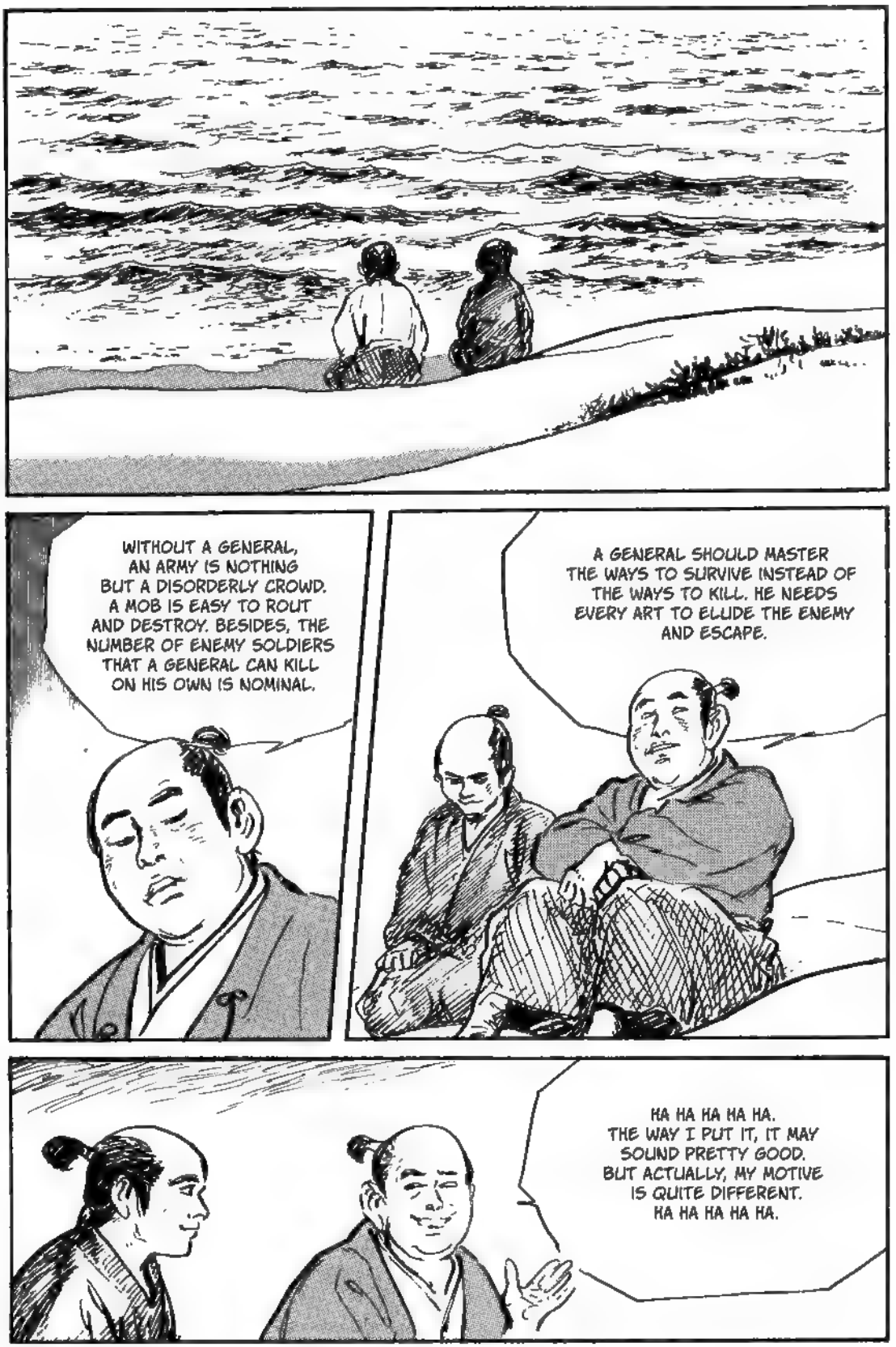

REMOVE YOUR RIGHT FOOT FROM THE STIRRUP AND PUT YOUR BODY WEIGHT ON THE LEFT.

...BOLDLY DROP YOUR BODY ON THE LEFT SIDE OF THE HORSE.
HOOKING THE REIN ONTO THE SADDLE WITH YOUR LEFT HAND...
THIS TECHNIQUE LETS YOU CONCEAL YOURSELF, ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER.
HMM!
HM...
AND IF YOU DROP ALL THE WAY DOWN TO THE BELLY, YOU CAN HIDE UNDERNEATH.




SA
HA HA
HA HA HA
HA HA HA
HA.

CLAP
CLAP

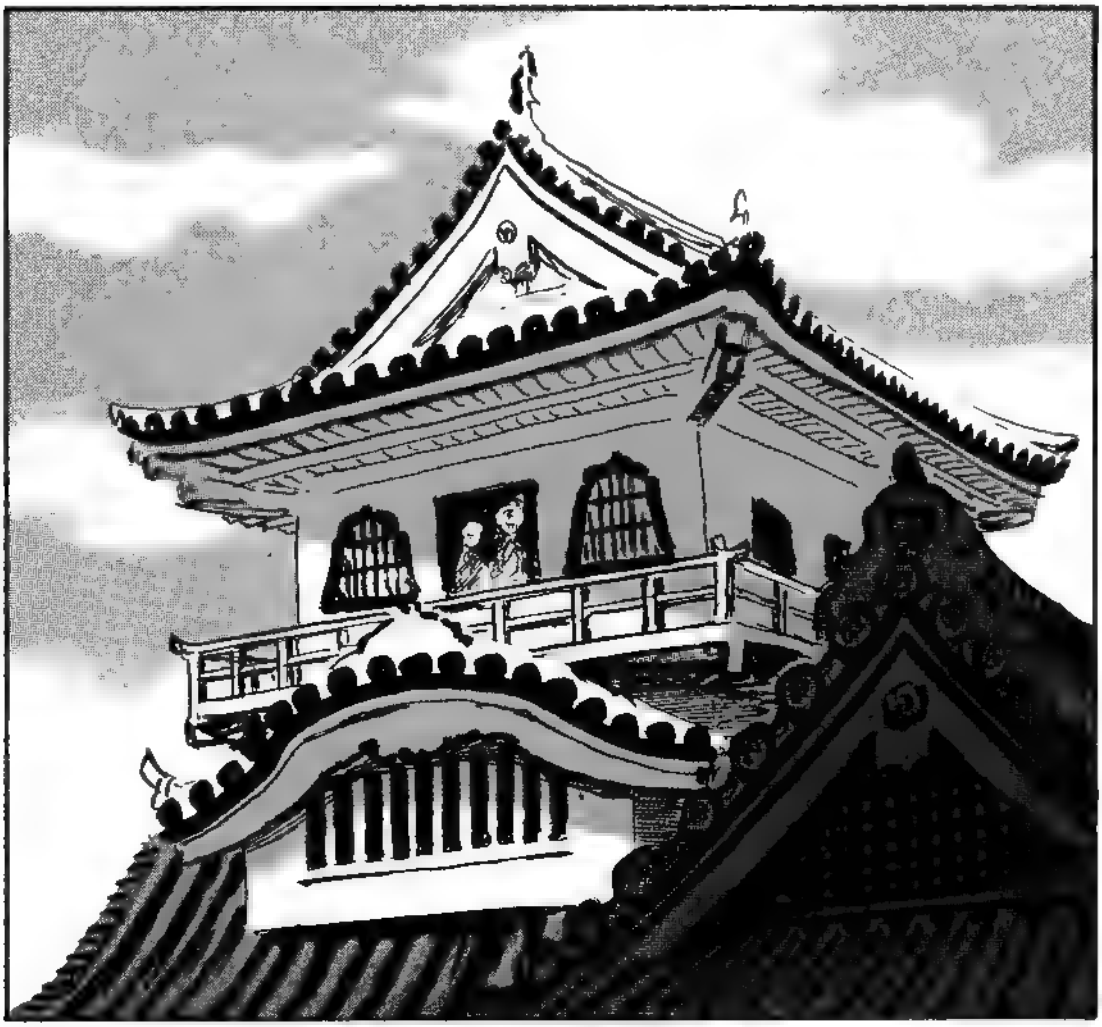

WITHOUT A GENERAL, AN ARMY IS NOTHING BUT A DISORDERLY CROWD. A MOB IS EASY TO ROUT AND DESTROY. BESIDES, THE NUMBER OF ENEMY SOLDIERS THAT A GENERAL CAN KILL ON HIS OWN IS NOMINAL.
A GENERAL SHOULD MASTER THE WAYS TO SURVIVE INSTEAD OF THE WAYS TO KILL. HE NEEDS EVERY ART TO ELUDE THE ENEMY AND ESCAPE.
HA HA HA HA HA. THE WAY I PUT IT, IT MAY SOUND PRETTY GOOD. BUT ACTUALLY, MY MOTIVE IS QUITE DIFFERENT. HA HA HA HA HA.

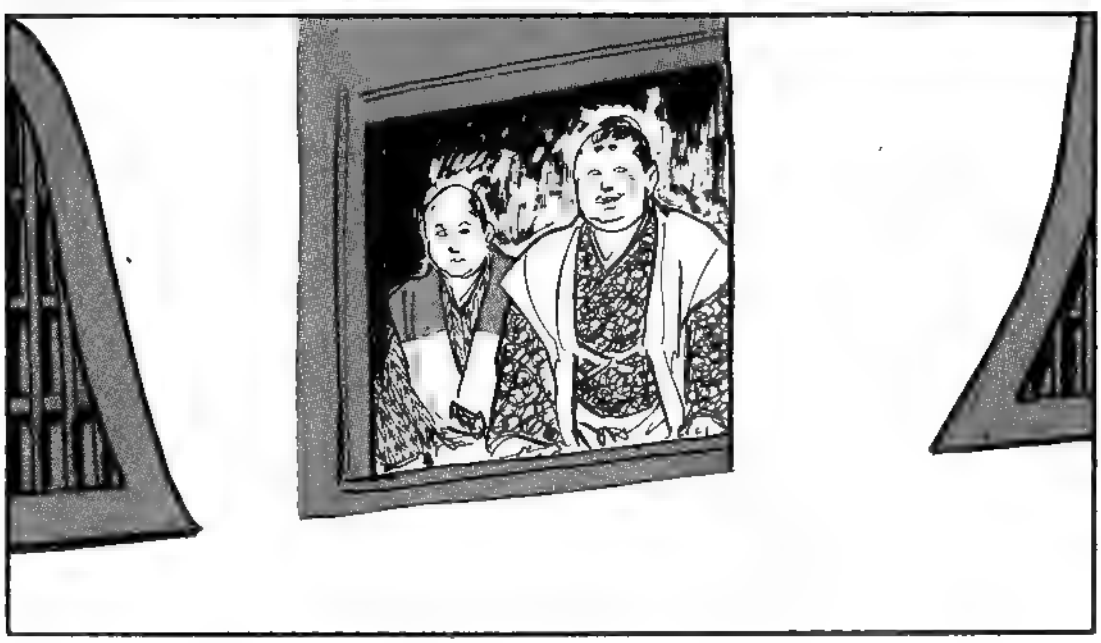
I MIGHT AS WELL CHANGE MY NAME TO NEYASU. HA HA HA HA HA.
UNLESS I STAY ALIVE, I WON'T BE ABLE TO LEAD A RELAXING LIFE WHERE ALL I DO IS LIE AROUND, YOU KNOW. HA HA HA HA HA.
TO TELL THE TRUTH, HANZŌ, EVEN IF A WAR STARTS, I WANT TO SURVIVE AND RETURN AND LIVE IN LEISURE.
NEYASU AND SAMEHAN, EH? HA HA HA HA HA.
I'M SAMEHAN, THEN, BECAUSE I'LL BE BY YOUR SIDE, ALWAYS AWAKE

NEYASU-SAMA, PLEASE HAVE A NICE NAP ON TOP OF IT.
HMM, I SEE.
I HEAR OUR COUNTRY, JAPAN, LOOKS JUST LIKE THIS.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA. IT MAKES IT HARDER TO FALL ASLEEP.

Chapter On Relinquishing Pain

No. 9: Crisis - The Tree at Risk





HM?!
I MUST APOLOGIZE.
I HEAR YOU'RE A FATHER NOW.

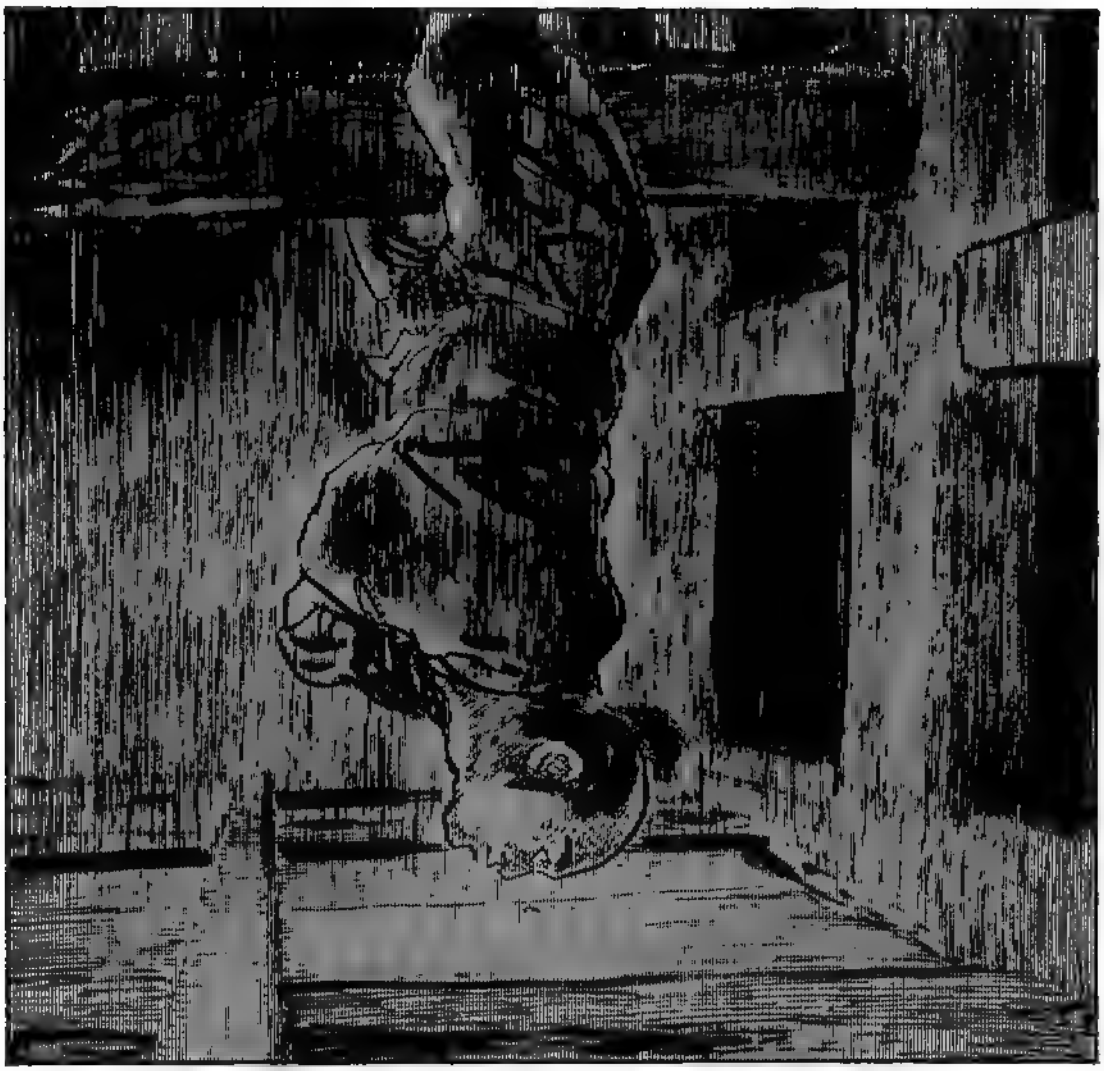
SHE COULD NEVER BECOME A USEFUL GENERAL TO YOU, MY LORD, SINCE SHE WON'T BE ABLE TO FIGHT IN THE WAR. THUS, I APOLOGIZE.
THAT'S FINE, ISN'T IT? WHY APOLOGIZE?
BECAUSE IT'S A GIRL.
I'M HONORED.
YOU'VE GROWN OLD ENOUGH TO SAY THE WORDS OF A MATURE MAN.
HO HO HO HO HO HO.
YES, SIR.
MOTONOBU.

?!
I DON'T DESERVE YOUR WORDS.
IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE SET YOUR ROOTS IN THE TREE CALLED IMAGAWA.
I AM GRATEFUL IF I COULD BE A TWIG.
WHAT DID YOU SAY?
AND I HAVE NO INTENTION OF DOING SO.
I HAVE NOT PUT DOWN ANY ROOTS AT ALL.
I MIGHT AS WELL BE A TWIG THAT WILL STRETCH ALL THE WAY TO THE CAPITAL AND HELP THE TREE TO SET ITS ROOT IN THE WHOLE COUNTRY-- THERE I MAY FALL AFTER THE WORK IS DONE.
THEN NO MATTER HOW OFTEN I MAY BE CUT OFF, THE TREE SHALL SUFFER NO HARM.

HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
WHY DON'T YOU GO VISIT OKAZAKI. I'M SURE THE OLD VASSALS OF MIKAWA ARE WORRIED.
YES... MY LORD.
THE BIRTH OF YOUR DAUGHTER IS AN OCCASION TO VISIT YOUR ANCESTORS' GRAVES TOO.
BESIDES, THEY SAY A NEWBORN IS THE REAPPEARANCE OF A DEPARTED SOUL.

YES.
HANZŌ, ARE YOU AROUND?
SHADOW THE LORD AND FIND OUT HIS TRUE INTENT.
YES, MILORD.

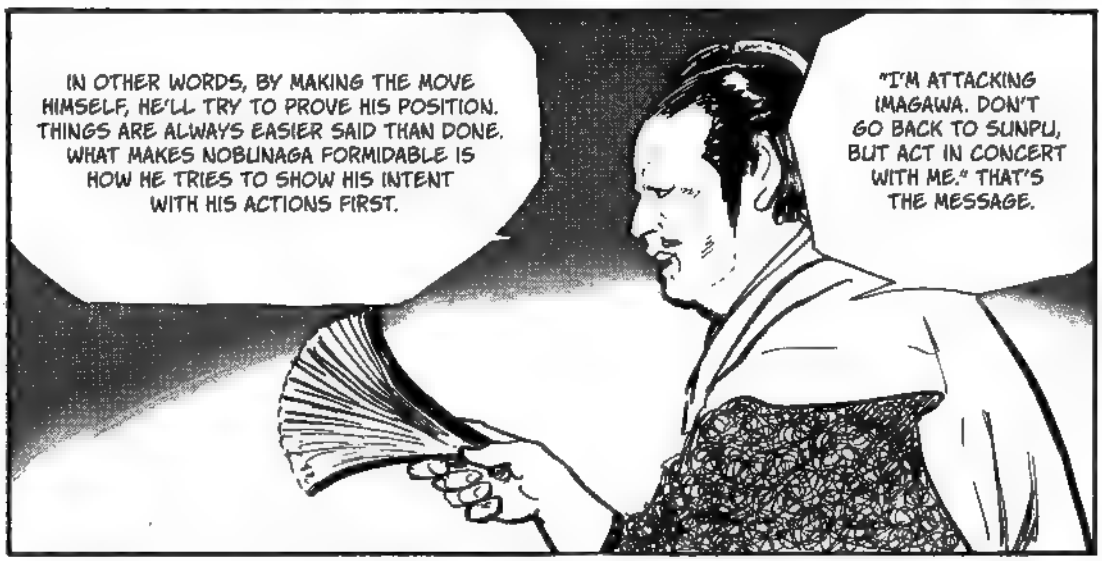
HO HO
HO HO.
THE TIME MIGHT NOT YET BE RIPE TO SEND MOTONOBU BACK TO OKAZAKI.
YOSHIHIRO, YOU DON'T TRUST YOUR OWN SON-IN-LAW THEN? HOW SMALL-MINDED YOU ARE. HO HO HO HO.

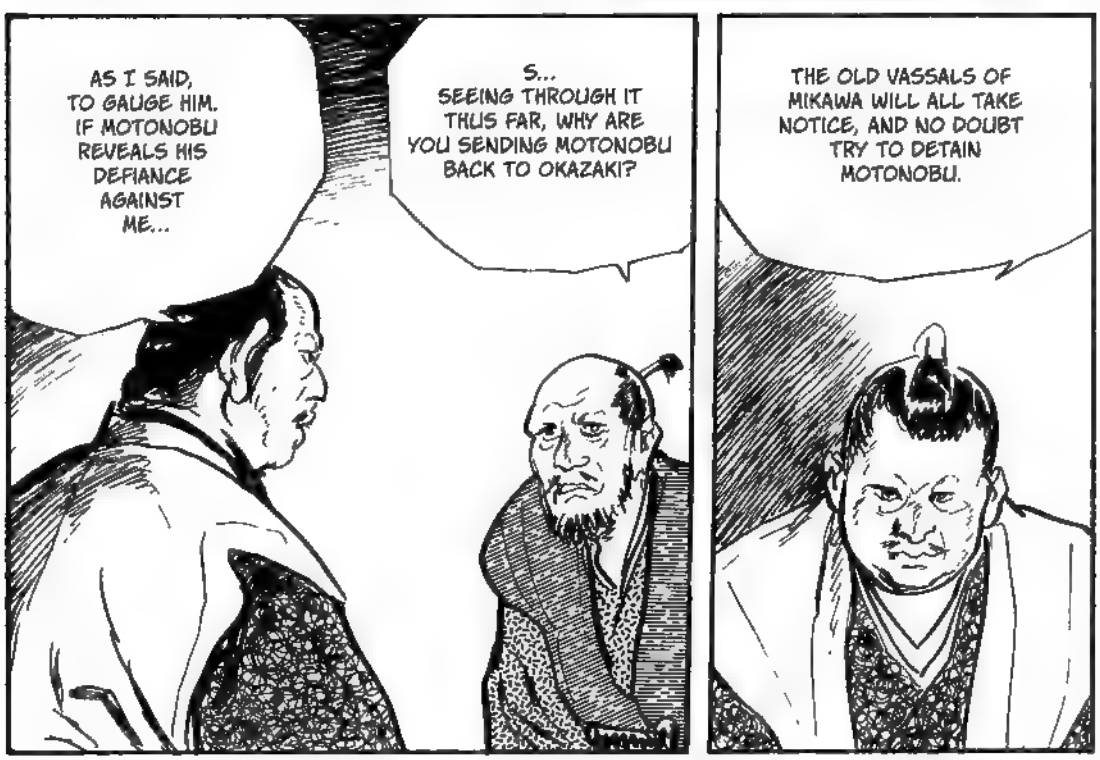


DOES HE MEAN WHAT HE SAYS? OR IS HE GROVELING?
ONLY THE MOST APPROPRIATE WORDS COME OUT OF THE BOY'S MOUTH NOW.
I WANT TO DISCOVER HOW SHREWD MOTONOBU IS. THAT'S ALL.

...NOBUNAGA WILL MAKE A MOVE.
ONCE MOTONOBU IS BACK IN OKAYAMA... HEH HEH HEH HEH...
IF HE'S TRUTHFUL, HE'LL BE USEFUL.
MORE PRECISELY, HE'LL FEIGN THE ATTACK.
I BET THE YOUNGSTER OF OWARI WILL ATTACK ODAKA CASTLE.

FROM WHAT I HEAR, NOBUNAGA TREATED HIM WITH WARM COMPASSION, AS IF THEY WERE BROTHERS.
NOBUNAGA IS CLOSE TO MOTONOBU. I'M SURE YOU HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN THAT MOTONOBU WAS ODA'S HOSTAGE.
THAT'S WHAT ATTACKING ODAKA CASTLE IS FOR.
ONCE NOBUNAGA LEARNS THAT MOTONOBU IS BACK IN OKAZAKI, I CAN SEE HIM SUGGESTING TO MOTONOBU TO TURN AGAINST IMAGAWA TOGETHER.

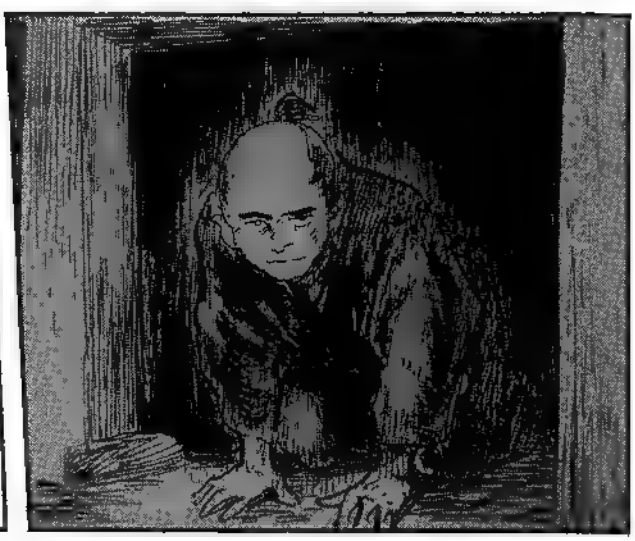

IN OTHER WORDS, BY MAKING THE MOVE HIMSELF, HE'LL TRY TO PROVE HIS POSITION. THINGS ARE ALWAYS EASIER SAID THAN DONE. WHAT MAKES NOBUNAGA FORMIDABLE IS HOW HE TRIES TO SHOW HIS INTENT WITH HIS ACTIONS FIRST.
"I'M ATTACKING IMAGAWA. DON'T GO BACK TO SUNPU, BUT ACT IN CONCERT WITH ME." THAT'S THE MESSAGE.


AS I SAID, TO GAUGE HIM. IF MOTONOBU REVEALS HIS DEFIANCE AGAINST ME...
S... SEEING THROUGH IT THUS FAR, WHY ARE YOU SENDING MOTONOBU BACK TO OKAZAKI?
THE OLD VASSALS OF MIKAWA WILL ALL TAKE NOTICE, AND NO DOUBT TRY TO DETAIN MOTONOBU.

...AS A FINE TWIG OF THE IMAGAWA TREE, WHICH IS ABOUT TO SPREAD ITS ROOTS OVER THE ENTIRE COUNTRY.
HOWEVER, IF HE RETURNS TO SUNPU AS IF NOTHING CHANGED, HE'LL BE USEFUL...
AND RID US OF ALL FUTURE TROUBLES.
...I'LL CRUSH HIM OUTRIGHT.
YOSHIHIRO, MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR MOTONOBU'S RETURN TO OKAZAKI, AND PREPARE FOR BATTLE.
YES, MY LORD.
...SLAUGHTER EVERY SAMURAI OF MIKAWA WITHOUT EXCEPTION.
CONSPIRE WITH THE JODAI OF OKAZAKI CASTLE, AND IF MOTONOBU MAKES ANY ODD MOVES...

ZU OHH!

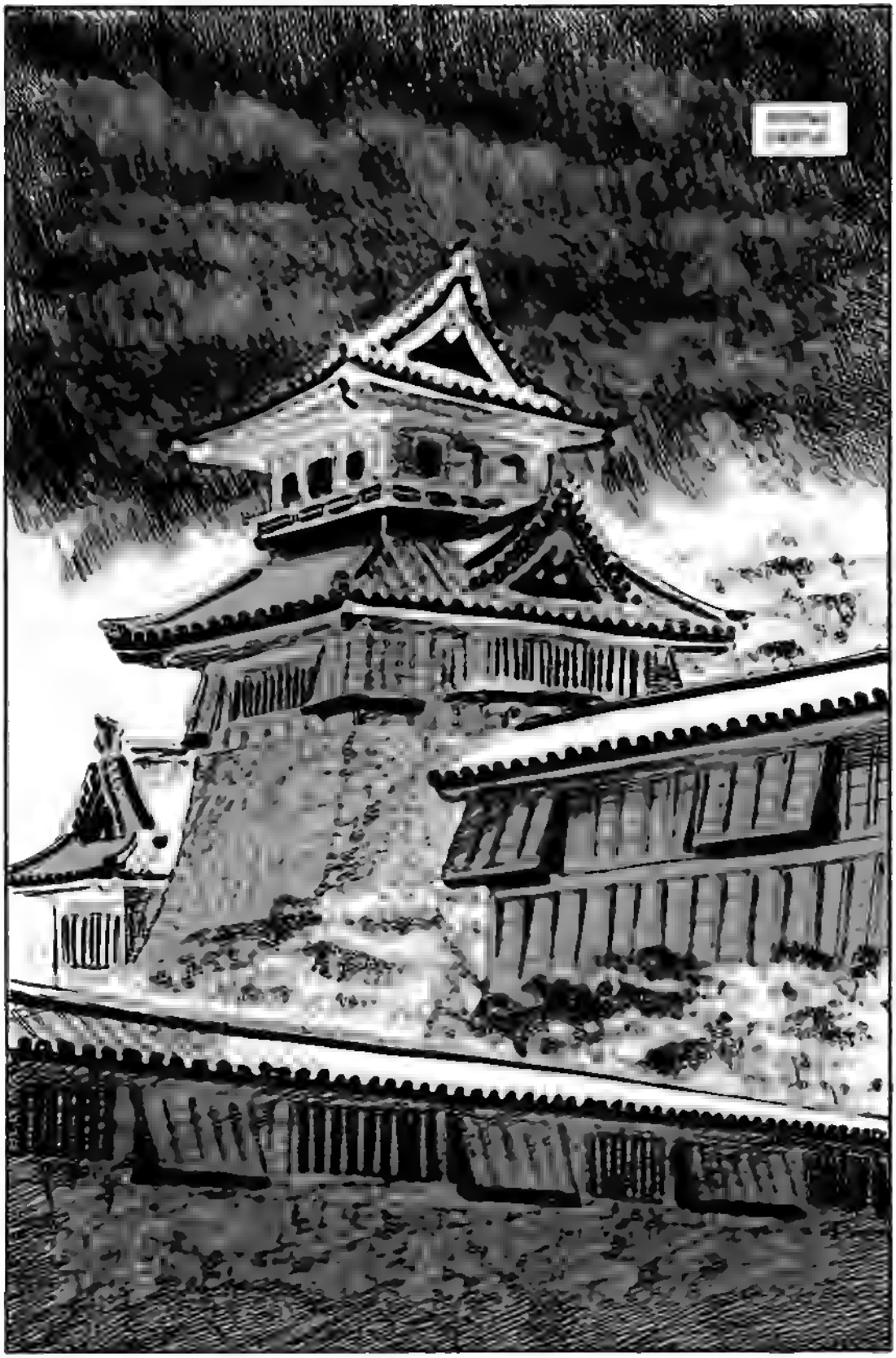
THAT'S TERRIBLE.

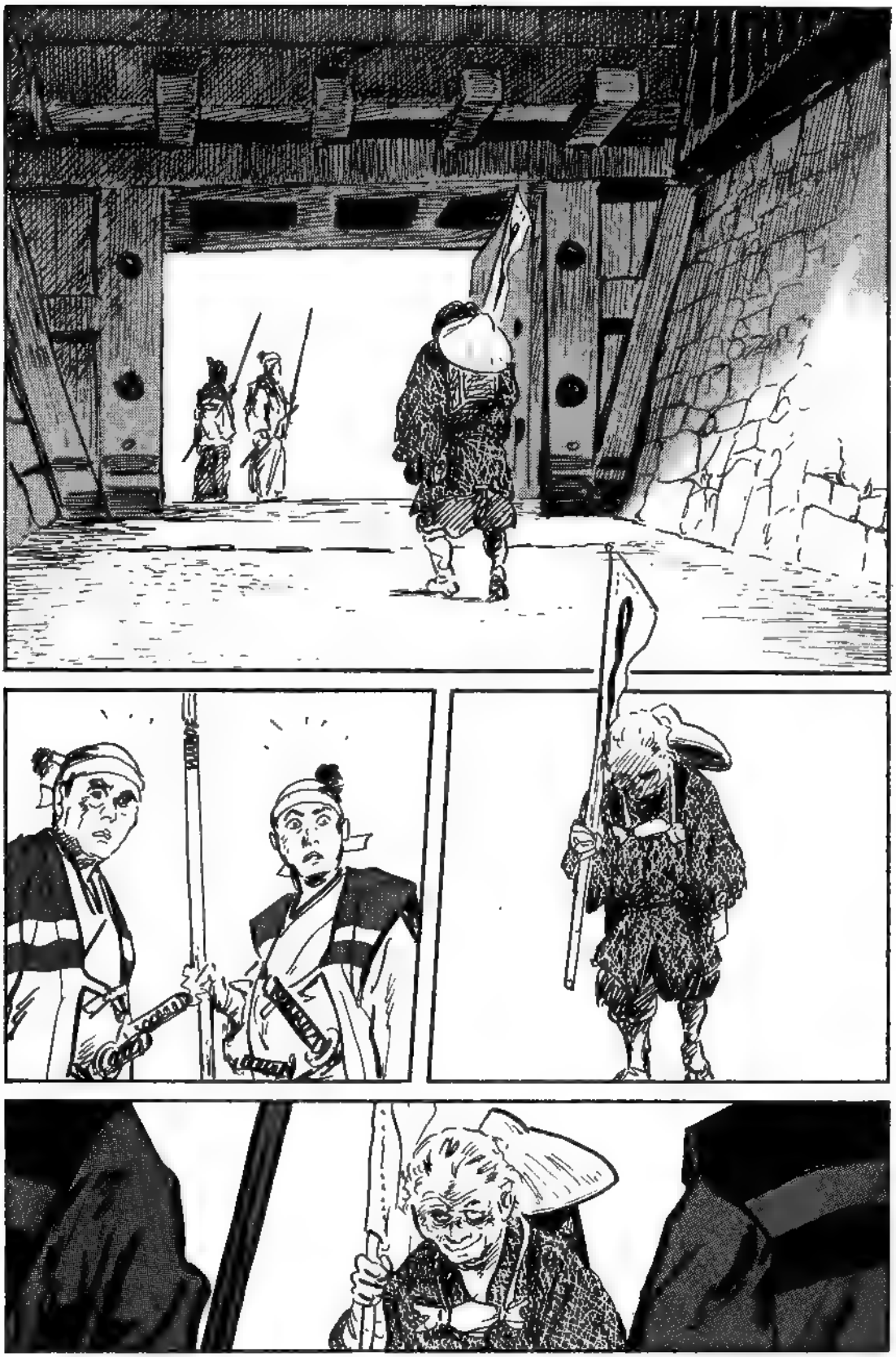


BUT BECAUSE YOU CAN SEE TOMORROW, MY LORD...

HANZŌ, MY TOMORROW IS FULL OF TERROR.

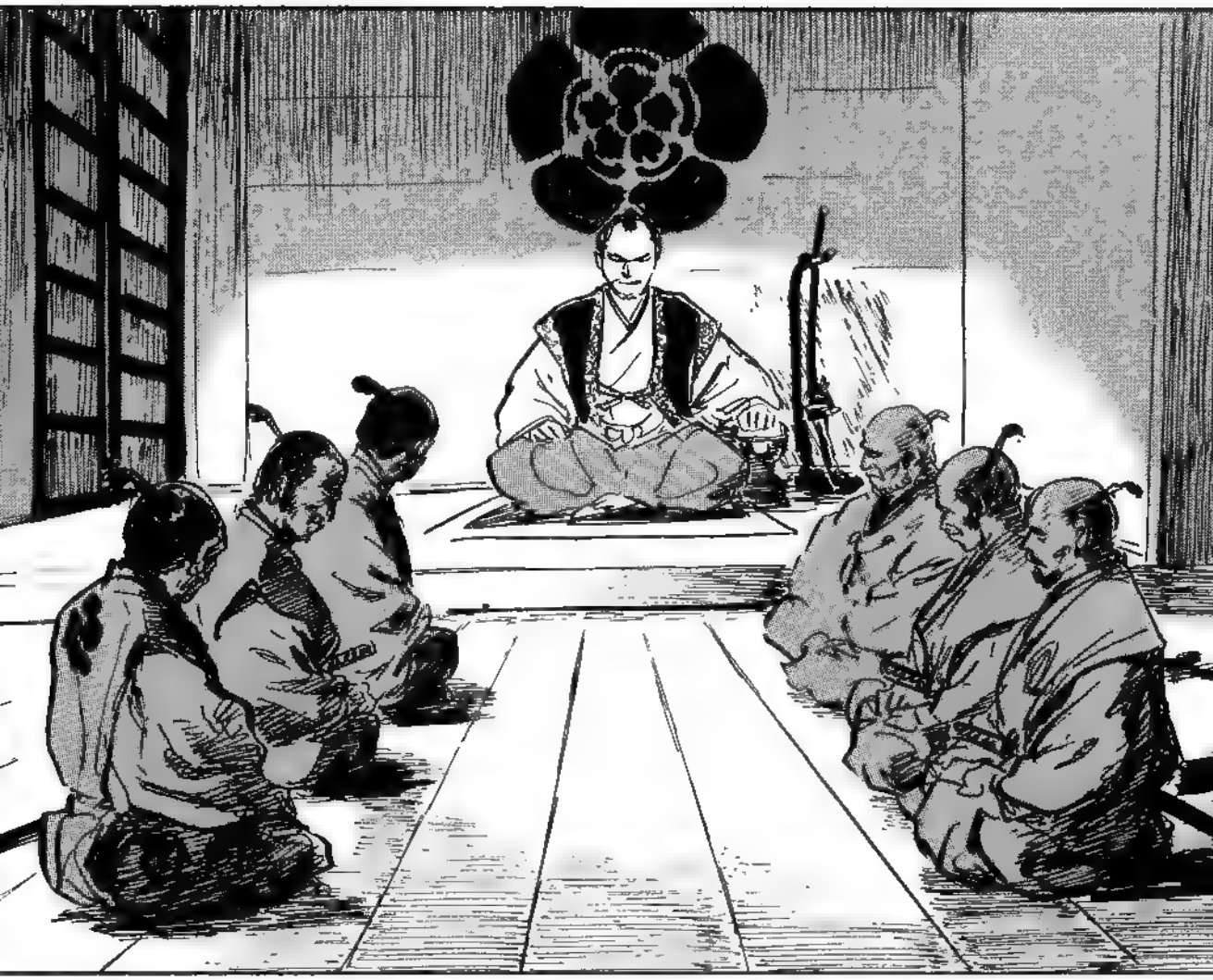
WHAT IF TOMORROW BECOMES IMPOSSIBLE TO SEE?
...I'LL BE ABLE TO SURVIVE, EH?
YES.
SINCE THERE IS ONLY YOU AND I, I GUESS THAT WOULD BE ALL WE COULD DO.
HEH HEH HEH. HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
YOU CAN RIDE ON MY SHOULDERS THEN.





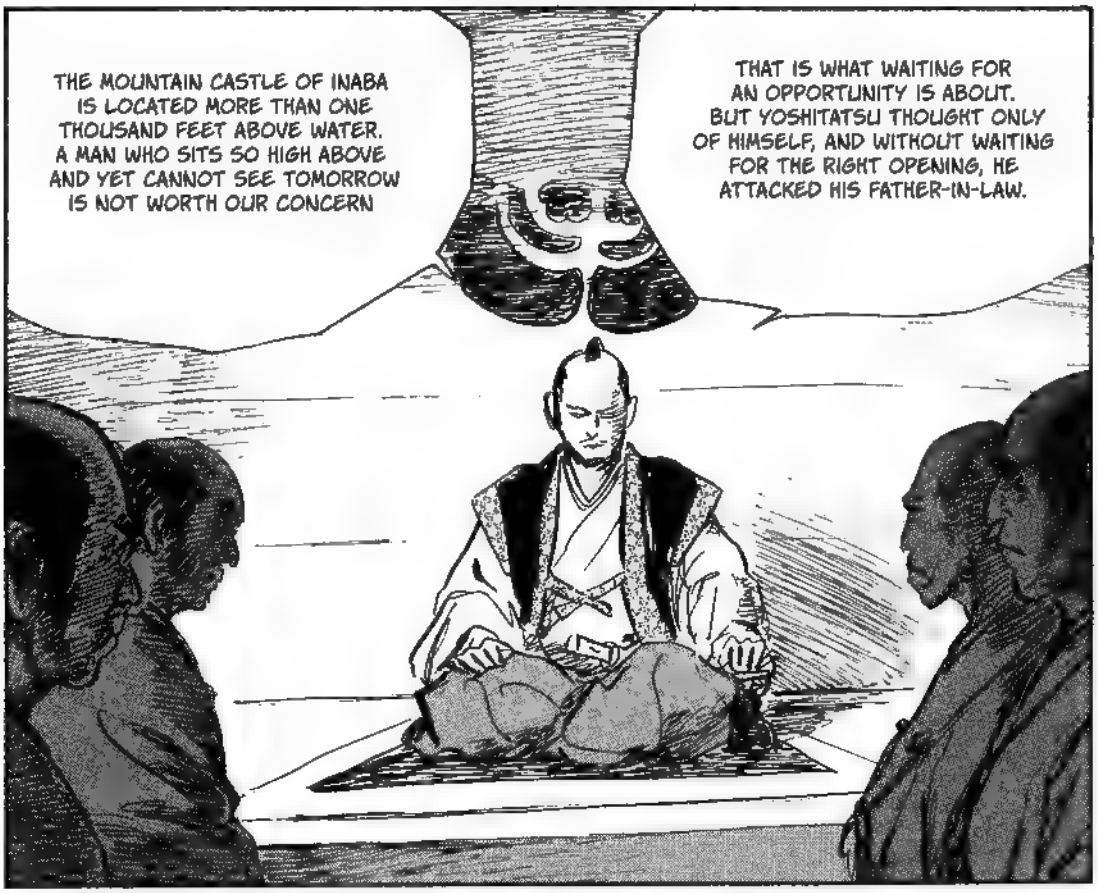
IT'S ON ORDERS FROM OUR LORD HIMSELF, BUT WHY IS THAT GEEZER ALLOWED TO COME AND GO SO FREELY?
THAT OLD NEEDLE PEDDLER GIVES ME THE CREEPS EVERY TIME I SEE HIM.
DESPITE HIS AGE, EH?
I BET HE'S A *SUPPA* SENT OUT TO INVESTIGATE WHAT'S GOING ON AROUND THE COUNTRY.
I'M ONLY TWENTY-THREE. THAT MAKES ME TWO YEARS YOUNGER THAN NOBUNAGA-*SAMA*.
CUT IT OUT.

LOOK.
IT'S THE DUST THAT MAKES MY HAIR LOOK GRAY



IF HE DOES, IMAGAWA WILL DEFINITELY SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY AND HEAD FOR THE CAPITAL.
THE QUESTION IS WHETHER YOSHITATSU WOULD ATTACK US.
TAKEDA, NAGAO, HŌJŌ, AND MŌRI. THEY ALL THINK I AM LIKELY TO LOSE IF I COMPETE AGAINST IMAGAWA.

INSTEAD, I WOULD'VE SAT OUT AND WATCHED ODA AND IMAGAWA FIGHT IT OUT.
IF I WERE YOSHITATSU, I WOULD NOT HAVE ATTACKED MY FATHER-IN-LAW UNDER THE CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES.
... AND TAKEN FULL CONTROL OF MINO.
AND I WOULD'VE STRUCK DOSAN-*DONO* AFTER THE WAR...
ON THE OTHER HAND, EVEN IF I DEFEATED IMAGAWA, MY FIGHTING STRENGTH WOULD BE EXHAUSTED, AND WE'D BE HARD PRESSED TO RESIST YOSHITATSU'S ATTACK.
IF YOSHITATSU DID THAT, EVEN IF IMAGAWA DEFEATED ME, WORRYING ABOUT YOSHITATSU'S MOVE WOULD HAVE SLOWED IMAGAWA DOWN.


THE MOUNTAIN CASTLE OF INABA IS LOCATED MORE THAN ONE THOUSAND FEET ABOVE WATER. A MAN WHO SITS SO HIGH ABOVE AND YET CANNOT SEE TOMORROW IS NOT WORTH OUR CONCERN
THAT IS WHAT WAITING FOR AN OPPORTUNITY IS ABOUT. BUT YOSHITATSU THOUGHT ONLY OF HIMSELF, AND WITHOUT WAITING FOR THE RIGHT OPENING, HE ATTACKED HIS FATHER-IN-LAW.

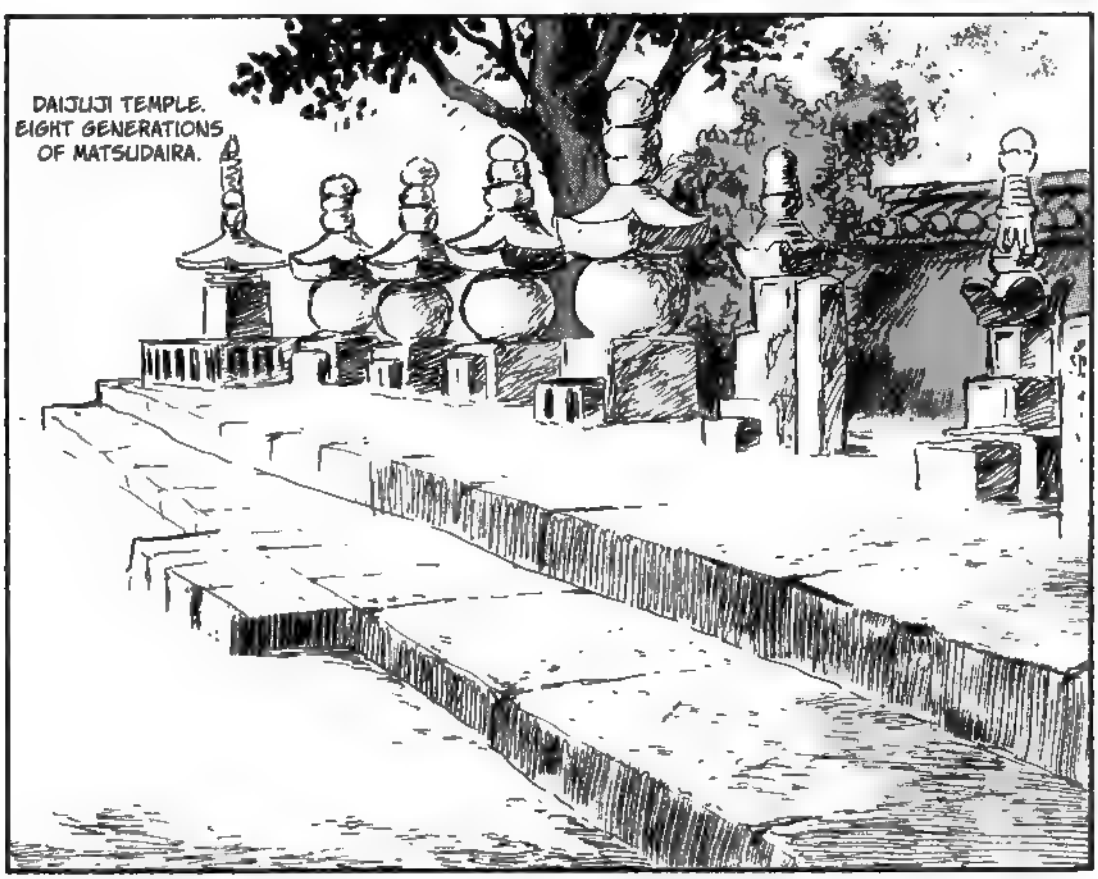
WHEN THE MAN CANNOT EVEN SEE FROM SO HIGH ABOVE, WHY WOULD HE DARE COME DOWN AND FIGHT BELOW?!
YOSHITATSU WILL NOT MAKE A MOVE.

LEAVE, ALL OF YOU.

COME HERE, NEEDLE PEDDLER.
...MAY SPREAD THE RUMOR THAT NOBUNAGA-SAMA USES A NEEDLE PEDDLER AS HIS *SUPPA*, WHICH WILL MAKE IT HARDER FOR ME TO WORK FOR YOU.
I'M AFRAID, MILORD, SHOUTING "NEEDLE PEDDLER" SO OFTEN...
BUT I AM NOT BALD.
HOW ABOUT "BALDY RAT" THEN?
HMPH.

JUST TELL ME THE NEWS.
MATSUDAIRA MOTONOBU-SAMA OF SUNPU HAS RETURNED TO OKAZAKI TO VISIT HIS ANCESTORS' GRAVES.
TAKECHIYO... IN OKAZAKI.

UPON RETURNING TO HIS OWN CASTLE, HE FOUND NO VASSALS OF HIS OWN BUT A *JODAI*, AND MUST BOW DOWN TO HIM.
THE OLD LIEGES LIKE TORII TADAYOSHI AND ŌKUBO TADATOSHI RECEIVED HIM. AFTER HE PAID HIS RESPECT TO THE *JODAI* OF OKAZAKI CASTLE, HE ENTERED DAIJUJI TEMPLE FOR HIS STAY.
EVERYONE!
WE'RE ATTACKING ODAKA CASTLE!


DAIJUJI TEMPLE.
EIGHT GENERATIONS
OF MATSUDAIRA.

M...
MILORD!

T...
TERRIBLE...
I HEAR THAT NOBUNAGA-*DONO* IS ATTACKING ODAKA CASTLE.
I...
I CAN SEE...
TOMORROW...

WAAAA
WAAAA
DO
DO
DO
DO
KLAANG
KLAANG
WAAAA
OOOCB

DO
ドドド

OUR OBJECTIVE IS NOT TO TAKE THE CASTLE. WHAT WE WANT IS FOR TAKECHIYO TO DEFECT FROM IMAGAWA.
SLOW DOWN.

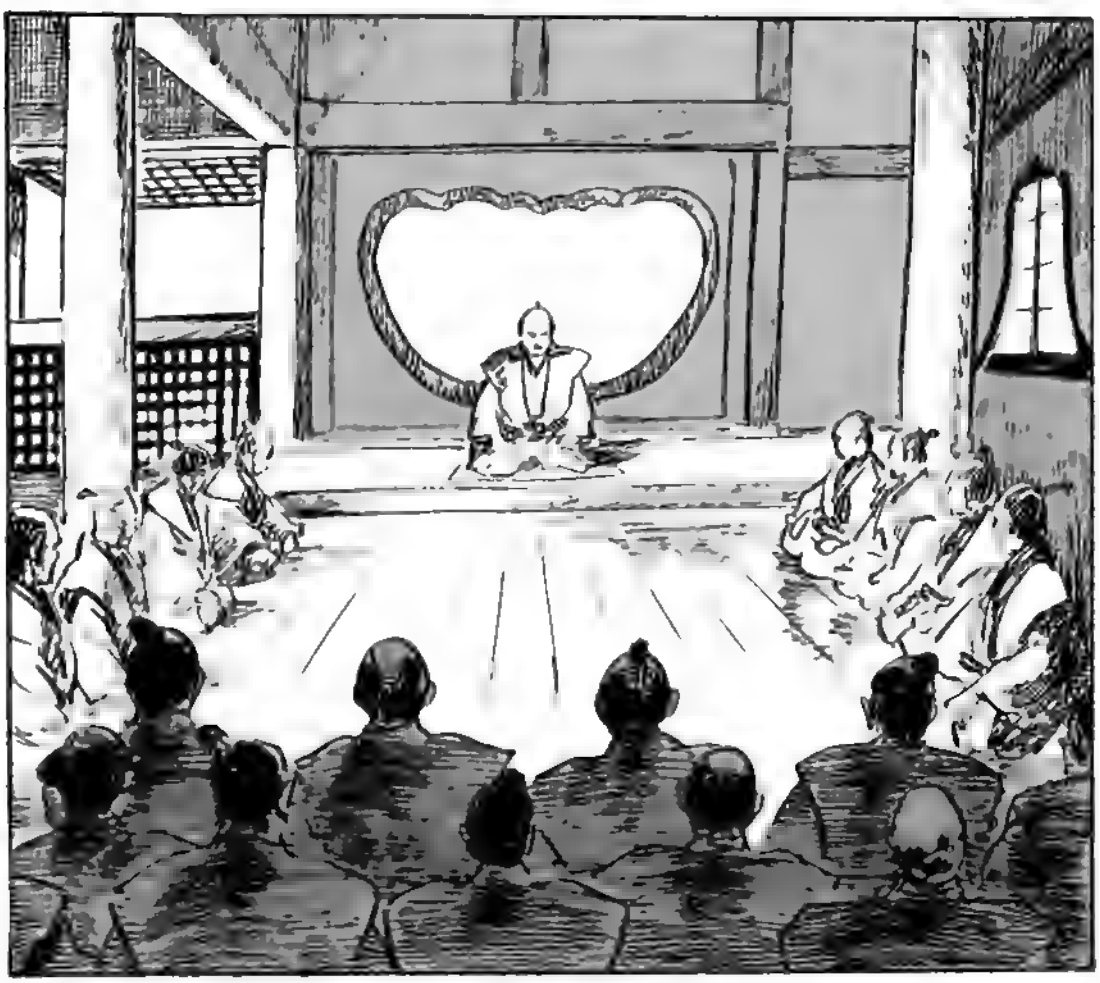
COME TO ME AND BRING THE SAMURAI OF MIKAWA WITH YOU.
HEE HEE. TAKECHIYO, NOW'S THE CHANCE.
CASTLE ONE OF MANY
TO IMAGAWA BUT THE ATTACK WAS
THE BAIT TO FISH OUT IEYASU WHO WAS
STAYING AT DAIJUJI TEMPLE IN OKAZAKI
UNDER PERMISSION TO VISIT
HIS ANCESTORS GRAVES
HEH HEH HEH HEH HEH.

FLY!
FLY!
AWEE
AWEEE
THAT VERY MOMENT, ODA'S SUPPA, MIYOSHI THE NEEDLE PEDDLER FROM HACHISUKA WAS RUSHING HIS HORSE FROM KIYOSU PLANNING TO COME OUT ABOVE THE YAHAGI RIVER TO LOOK OVER THE OPEN PLAINS OF MIKAWA FROM IWAZU

HE IS LATER KNOWN AS HIDEYOSHI.

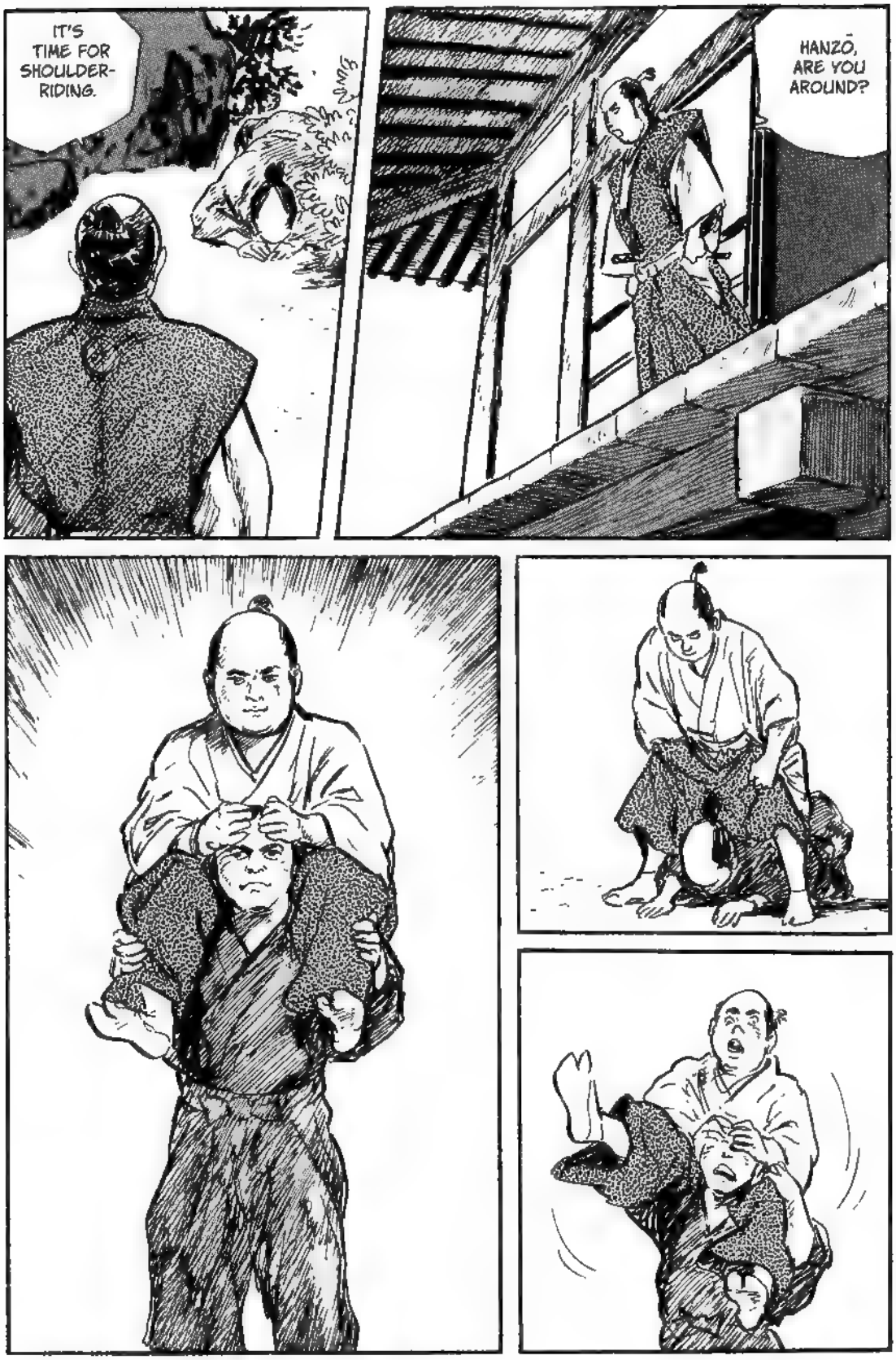
BACK
WHOA.

IF HE RUNS TO ODA, HE'LL BE CRUSHED FLAT-OUT IF HE DOESN'T, HE'LL WIN A POSITION OF TRUST IT'S A TEST
SO THIS IS WHY MOTONOBU-SAMA WAS GIVEN PERMISSION TO VISIT HIS ANCESTORS' GRAVES!
OH NO
TH. THE IMAGAWA FORCE.
NOBUNAGA-SAMA PLAYED RIGHT INTO YOSHIMOTO'S TRAP AND ATTACKED ODAKA CASTLE.
MMM. NOW, WHAT WILL MOTONOBU-SAMA DO?
PLEASE STAY PUT, MOTONOBU-SAMA
STAY PUT...

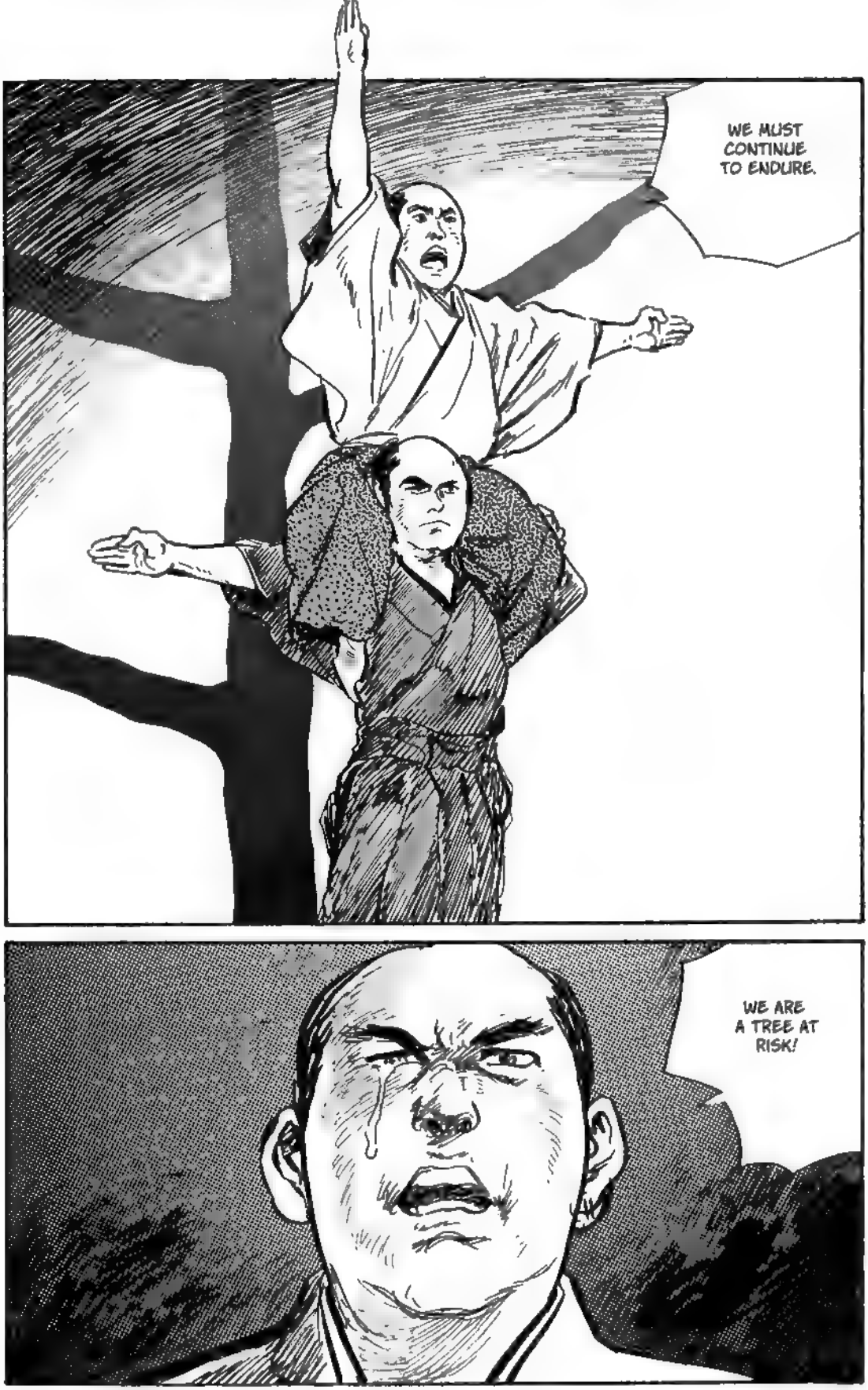


NOW IS OUR CHANCE TO FIGHT IMAGAWA IN CONCERT WITH ODA AND RESTORE OUR HONOR.
THERE COULD BE NO BETTER OPPORTUNITY.
M... MILORD, NOBUNAGA-*DONO'S* ATTACK UPON ODAKA CASTLE IS NOTHING BUT AN INVITATION FOR YOU TO DEFECT FROM IMAGAWA AND JOIN HIM.
SWALLOWING THE BITTERNESS, WE'VE FAWNED, GROVELED, CRAWLED, AND COWERED. THIS IS OUR CHANCE TO REAP THE REWARD OF SO MUCH PATIENCE.
LET'S GO TO WAR!

YAAAH
YAAAH
I MUST RETURN.
I WILL RETURN TO SUNPU.

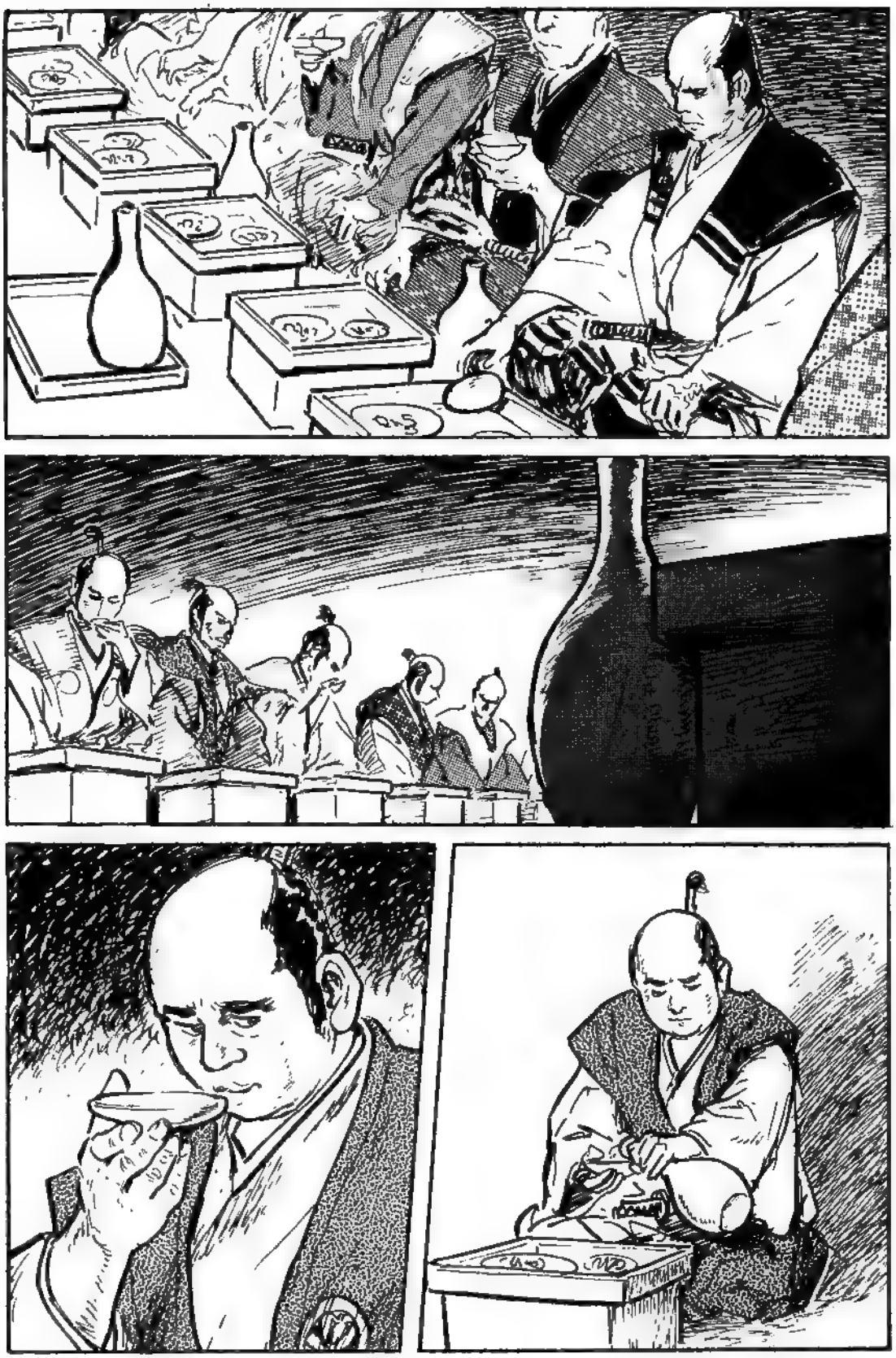

IT'S TIME FOR SHOULDER-RIDING.
HANZŌ, ARE YOU AROUND?

AND TO PREVENT THAT, I MUST RETURN.
WE ARE A TREE ABOUT TO FALL.
THIS IS OUR CRISIS. WE'RE AT RISK.

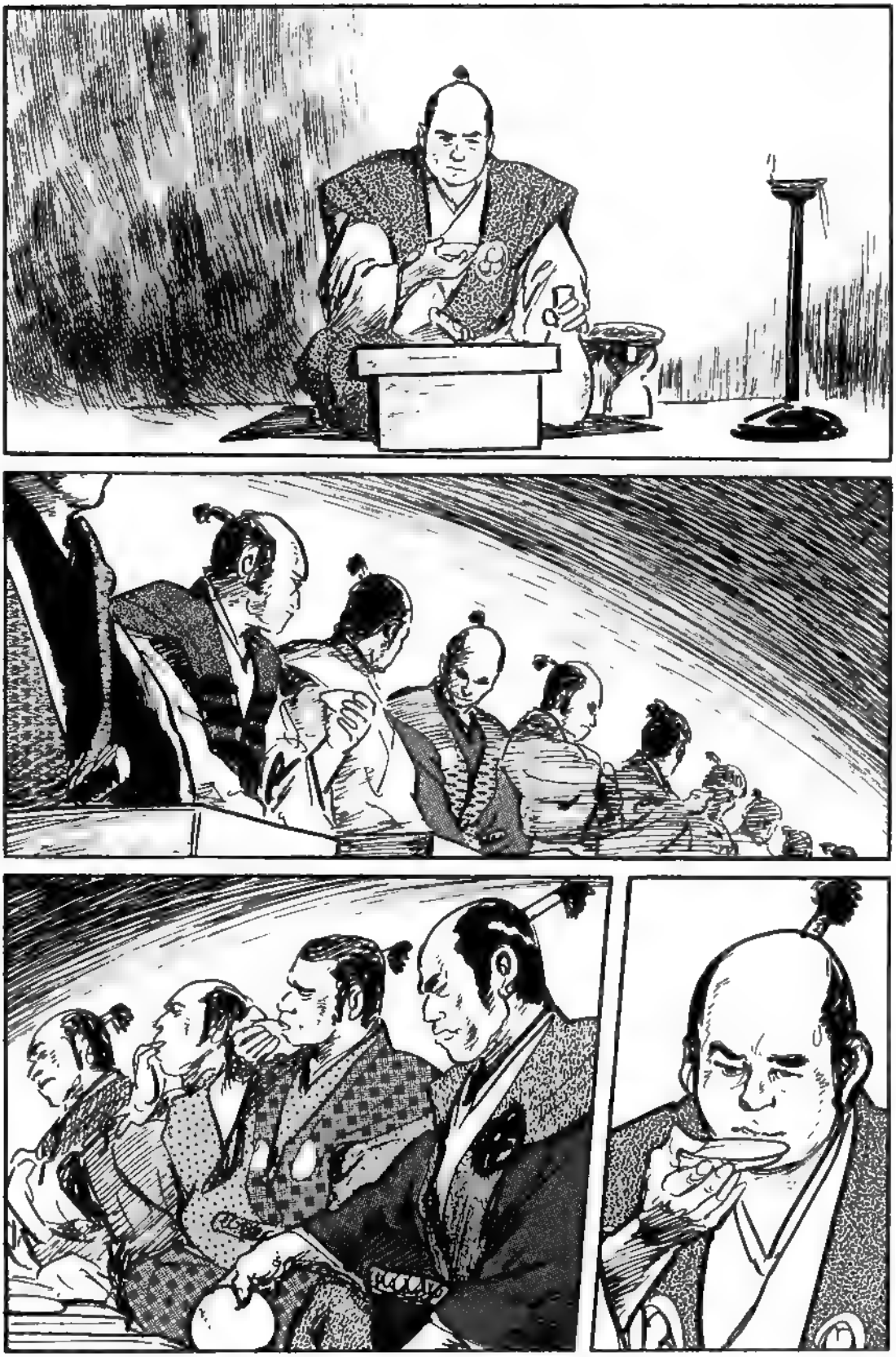

WE MUST CONTINUE TO ENDURE.
WE ARE A TREE AT RISK!

Chapter On Relinquishing Pain

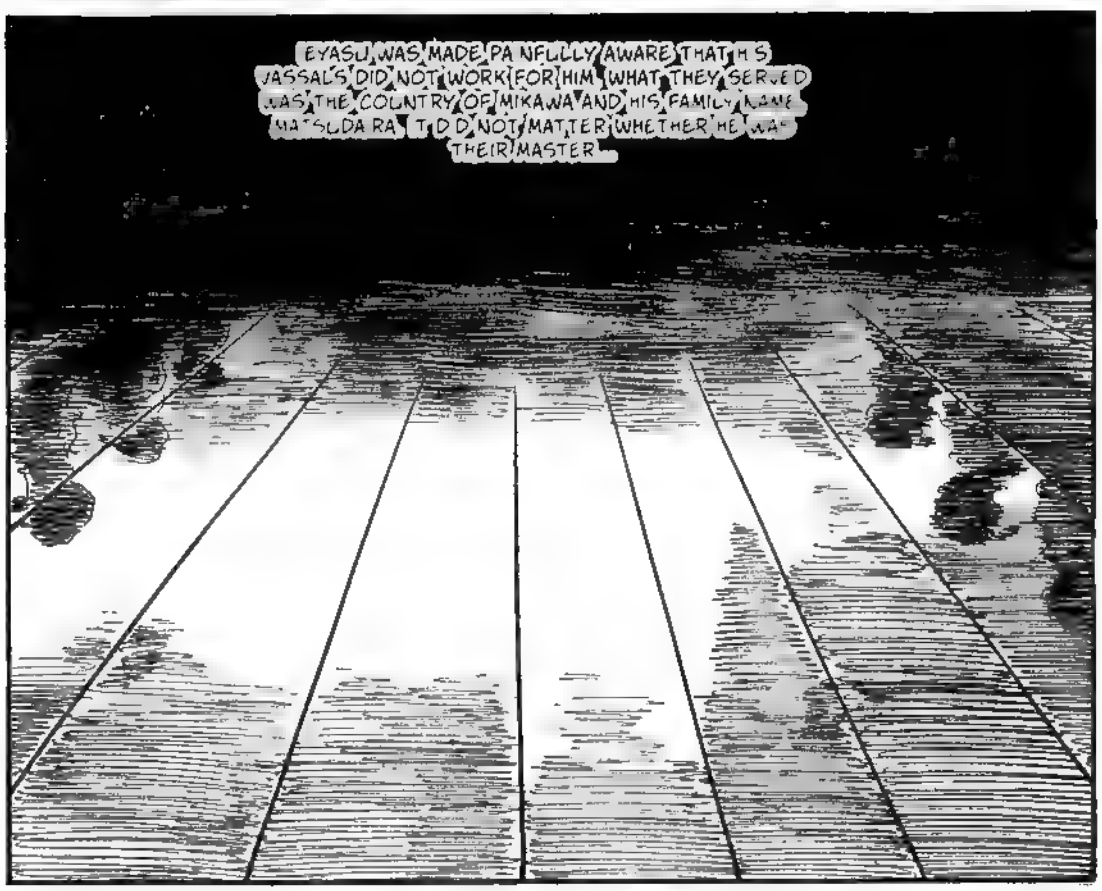
No. 10: Complete Absence



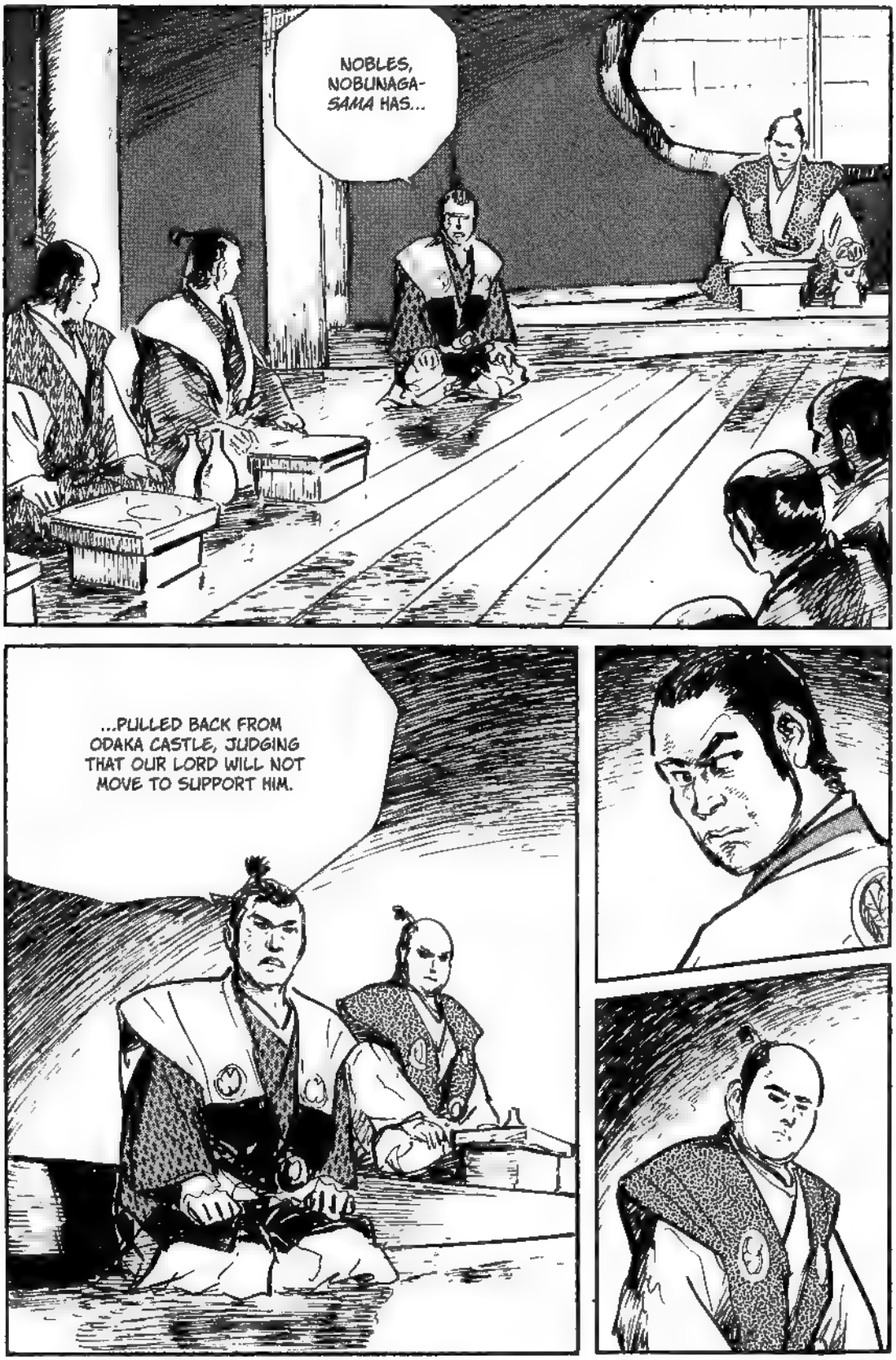
GULP



HE COULD NOT FEEL LIKE HE WAS AT HOME IN THE FAMILY TEMPLE WHERE HIS GRANDFATHER AND HIS FATHER REST
IEYASU FELT EXTREMELY AWKWARD


EYASU WAS MADE PAINFULLY AWARE THAT HIS VASSALS DID NOT WORK FOR HIM WHAT THEY SERVED WAS THE COUNTRY OF MIKAWA AND HIS FAMILY NAME MATSUDAIRA IT DID NOT MATTER WHETHER HE WAS THEIR MASTER

IEYASU TRULY WISHED TO BE BACK IN SUNPU. HE EVEN MISSED YOSHITOMO'S FACE.
IT WAS NO SURPRISE.
THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME HE COULD REMEMBER BEING IN MIKAWA AND MEETING HIS VASSALS.
SHOP
THUM
TROP
TROP
TROP

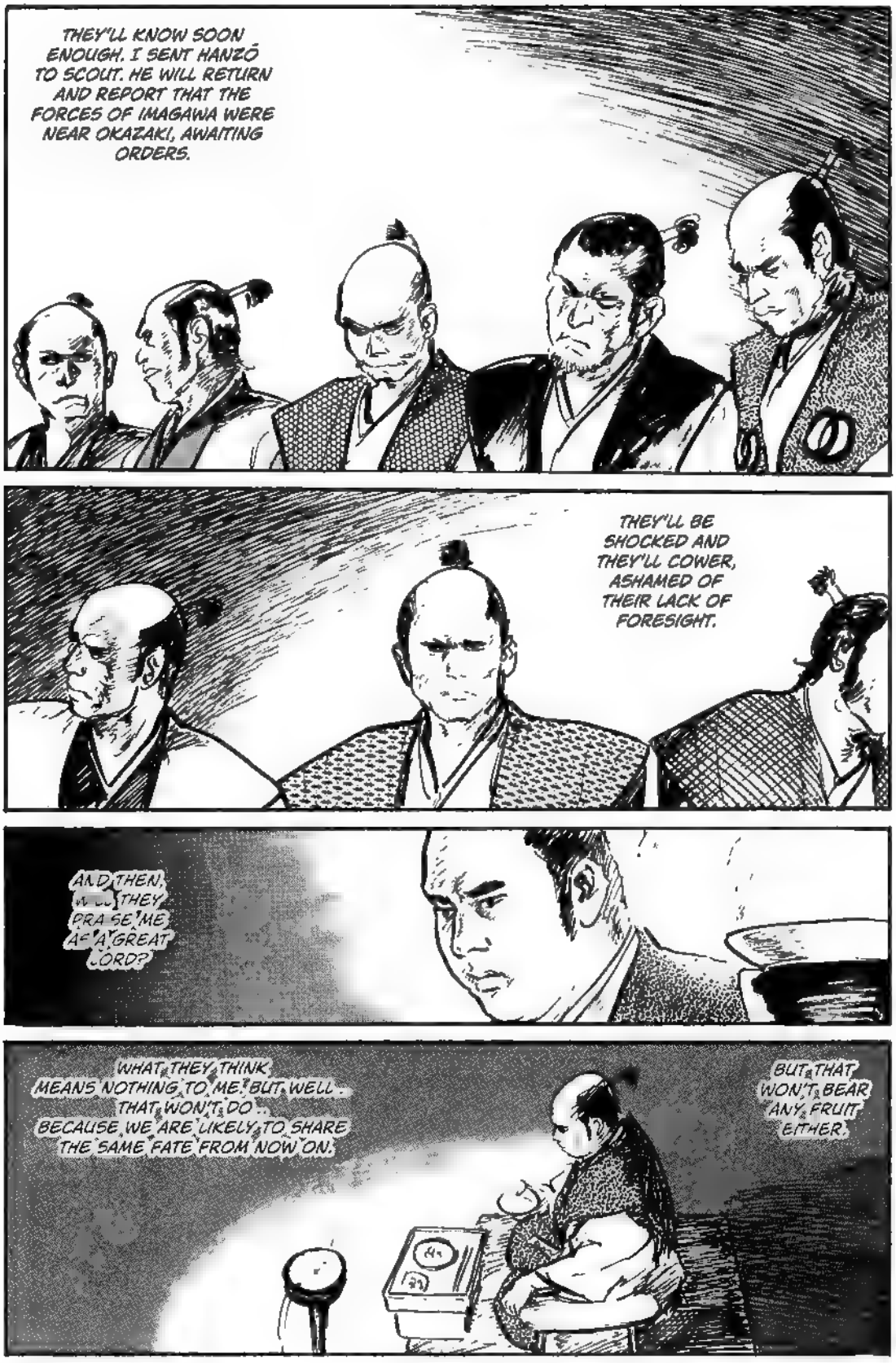

NOBLES, NOBUNAGA-SAMA HAS...
...PULLED BACK FROM ODAKA CASTLE, JUDGING THAT OUR LORD WILL NOT MOVE TO SUPPORT HIM.

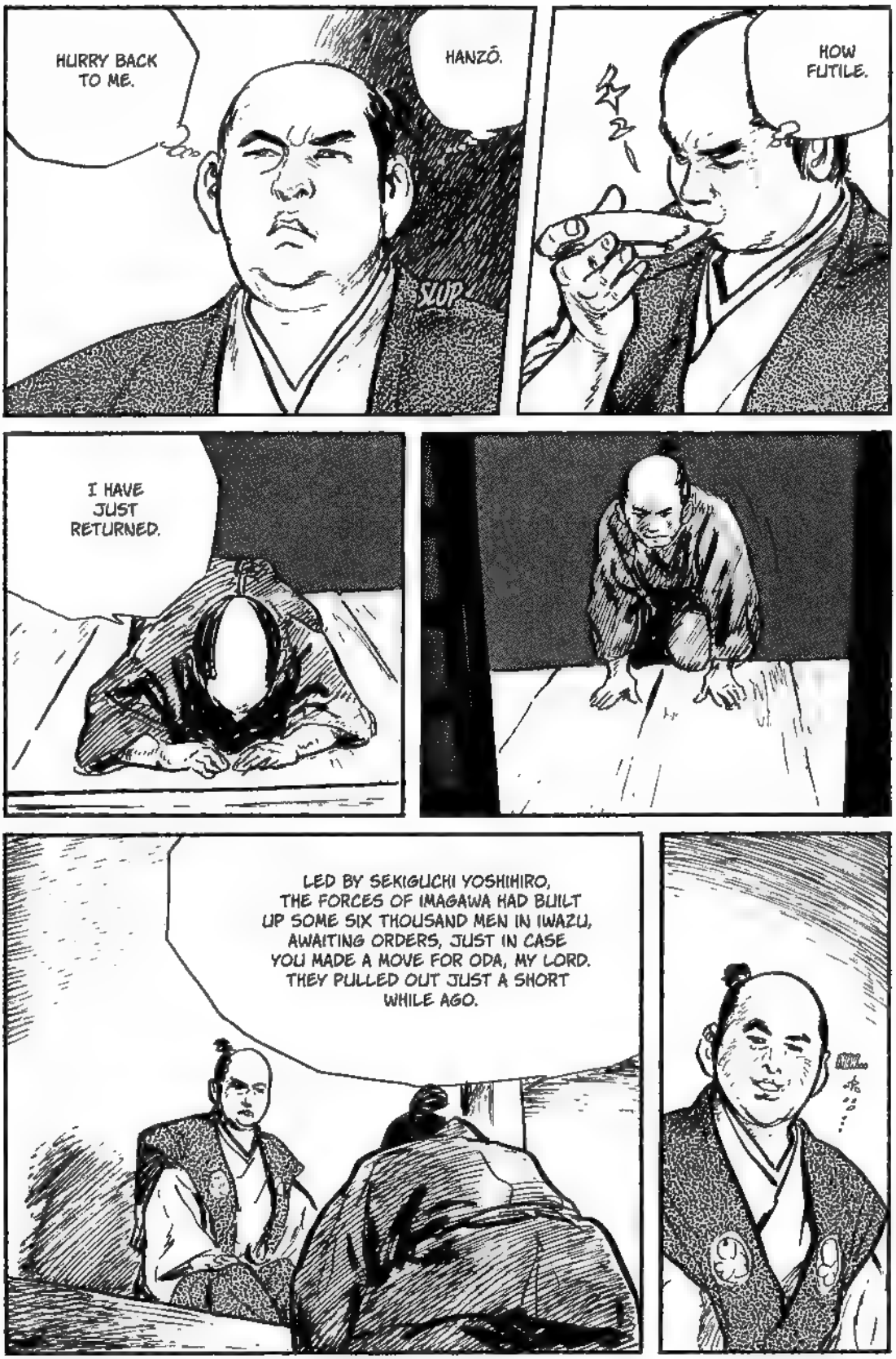
AND WE LET IT SLIP.
ARRG, THE OPPORTUNITY OF OUR LIFETIME.
ちぃ!
I AM WATANABE MORITSUNA
YES, MILORD.
Y... YOU'RE WATANABE, CORRECT?
TURNING YOUR BACK ON YOUR MASTER AND REPORTING TO HIS MEN FIRST. IS THAT THE CUSTOM OF MIKAWA?
WHOM ARE YOU TALKING TO?

I... I'M SORRY. IT WAS INEXCUSABLE.
FINE.
SLOW WIT. DUMB MASTER. COWARD DOG OF IMAGAWA.
YOU MUST ALL THINK OF ME AS SUCH.

THERE'S NO USE GETTING ANGRY ANYWAY.
FINE. I DON'T FEEL LIKE GETTING UPSET OVER IT.
HEH HEH HEH. EVEN IF YOU DON'T VOICE YOUR THOUGHTS, THE WAY YOU LOOK AT ME SAYS IT CLEARLY.

WHY CAN'T I GET UPSET?
WHAT'S FINE ABOUT IT?
WHY CAN'T I DO THAT?
AM I NOT THE LORD?
SHOUT! REVILE THEM! ISN'T THAT WHAT A MASTER DOES?
KNOWING HE COULDN'T AND UNDERSTANDING WHY, IEYASU WAS SAD.


THEY'LL KNOW SOON ENOUGH. I SENT HANZŌ TO SCOUT. HE WILL RETURN AND REPORT THAT THE FORCES OF IMAGAWA WERE NEAR OKAZAKI, AWAITING ORDERS.
THEY'LL BE SHOCKED AND THEY'LL COWER, ASHAMED OF THEIR LACK OF FORESIGHT.
AND THEN, WILL THEY PRAISE ME AS A GREAT LORD?
WHAT THEY THINK MEANS NOTHING TO ME. BUT, WELL... THAT WON'T DO... BECAUSE WE ARE LIKELY TO SHARE THE SAME FATE FROM NOW ON.
BUT THAT WON'T BEAR ANY FRUIT EITHER.


HURRY BACK TO ME.
HANZŌ.
SLUP
HOW FUTILE.
I HAVE JUST RETURNED.
LED BY SEKIGUCHI YOSHIHIRO, THE FORCES OF IMAGAWA HAD BUILT UP SOME SIX THOUSAND MEN IN IWAZU, AWAITING ORDERS, JUST IN CASE YOU MADE A MOVE FOR ODA, MY LORD. THEY PULLED OUT JUST A SHORT WHILE AGO.

ガ
NOOOOO!
ン…!

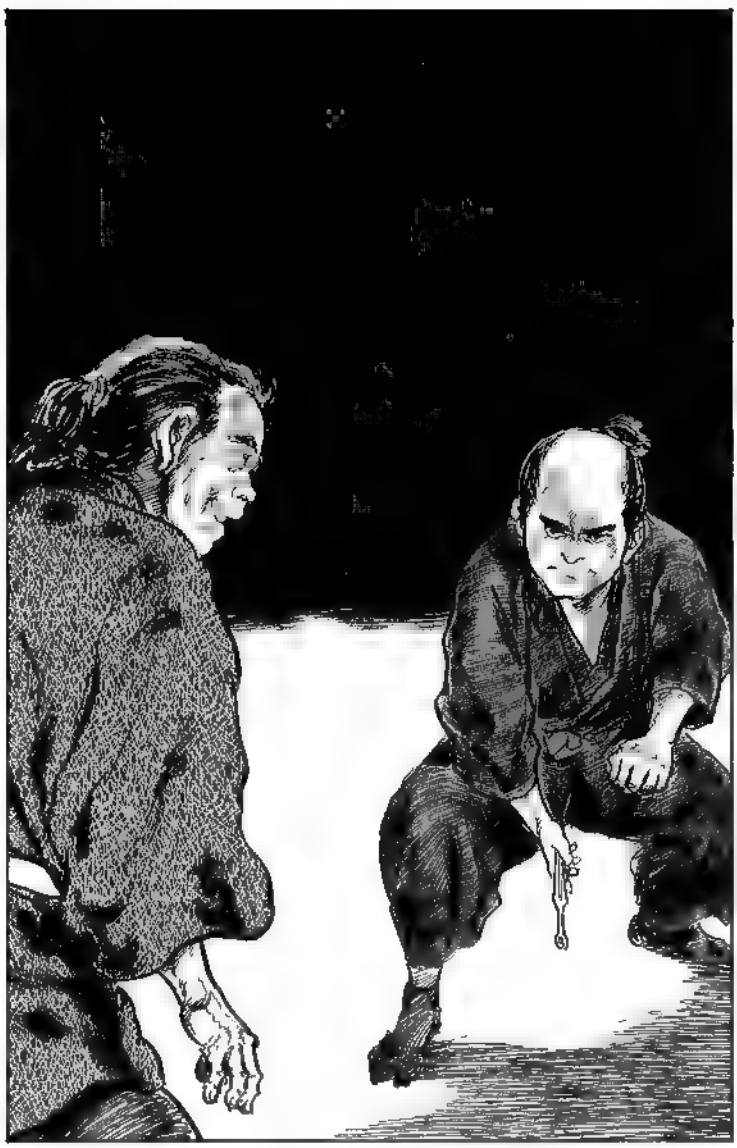
IT'S WHAT I ALREADY KNEW. AND YET I HAD TO TRUMPET THE REVELATION. I GUESS I DO WANT THEM TO THINK WELL OF ME AFTER ALL.
GOOD.

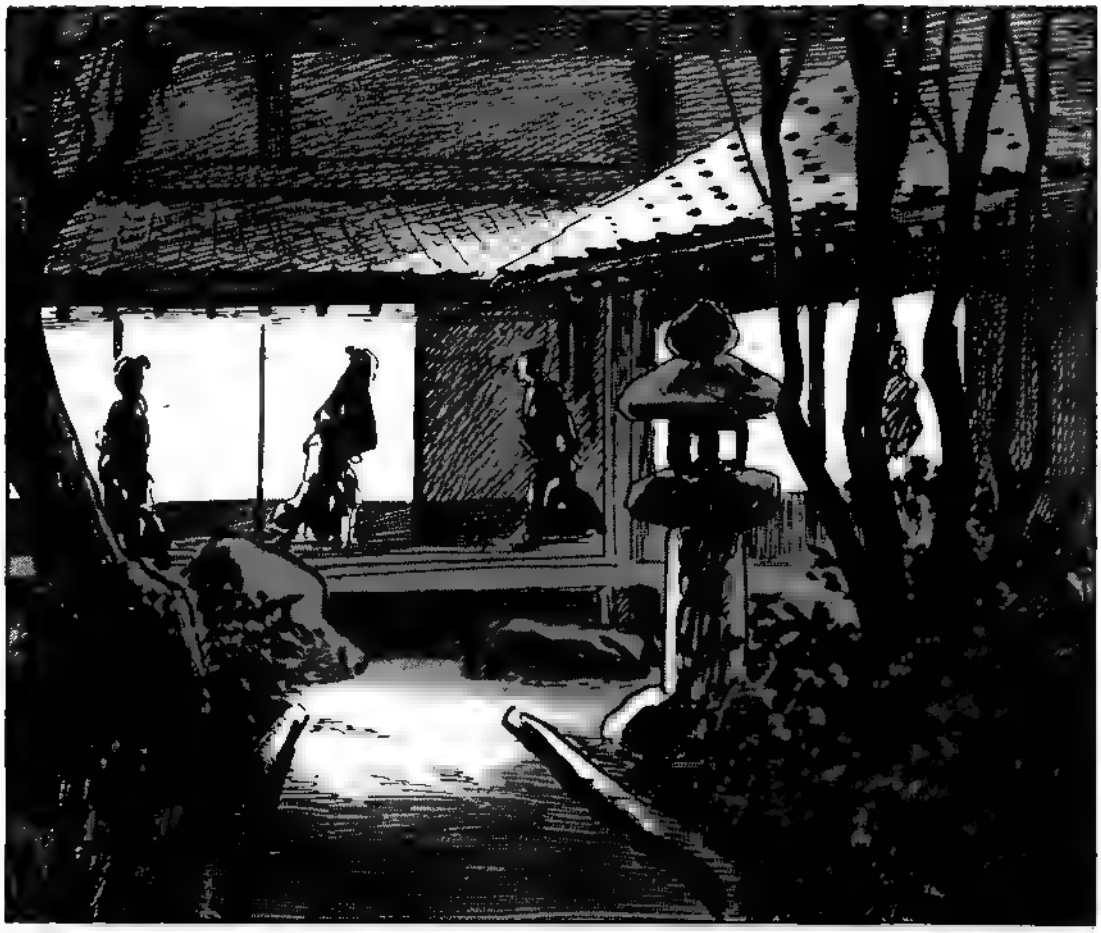
IEYASU WAS PAINFULLY AWARE THAT HE MUST FILL THE GAP. OTHERWISE, HE WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO USE HIS VASSALS AS HIS HANDS AND HIS EYES.
A COMPLETE ABSENCE OF TWELVE YEARS.

BUT THE FACT IS, IT WAS THE RESULT OF HIS THOUGHTFUL DIFFIDENCE TOWARD HIS VASSALS
YEARS LATER, IEYASU WAS REPUTED FOR HIS ABILITY TO USE MEN WELL AND UNDERSTAND HOW THEY FELT
HE IS SUFFERING.
NOT THAT MOST HISTORIANS REACH THE SAME CONCLUSION...
SLURP

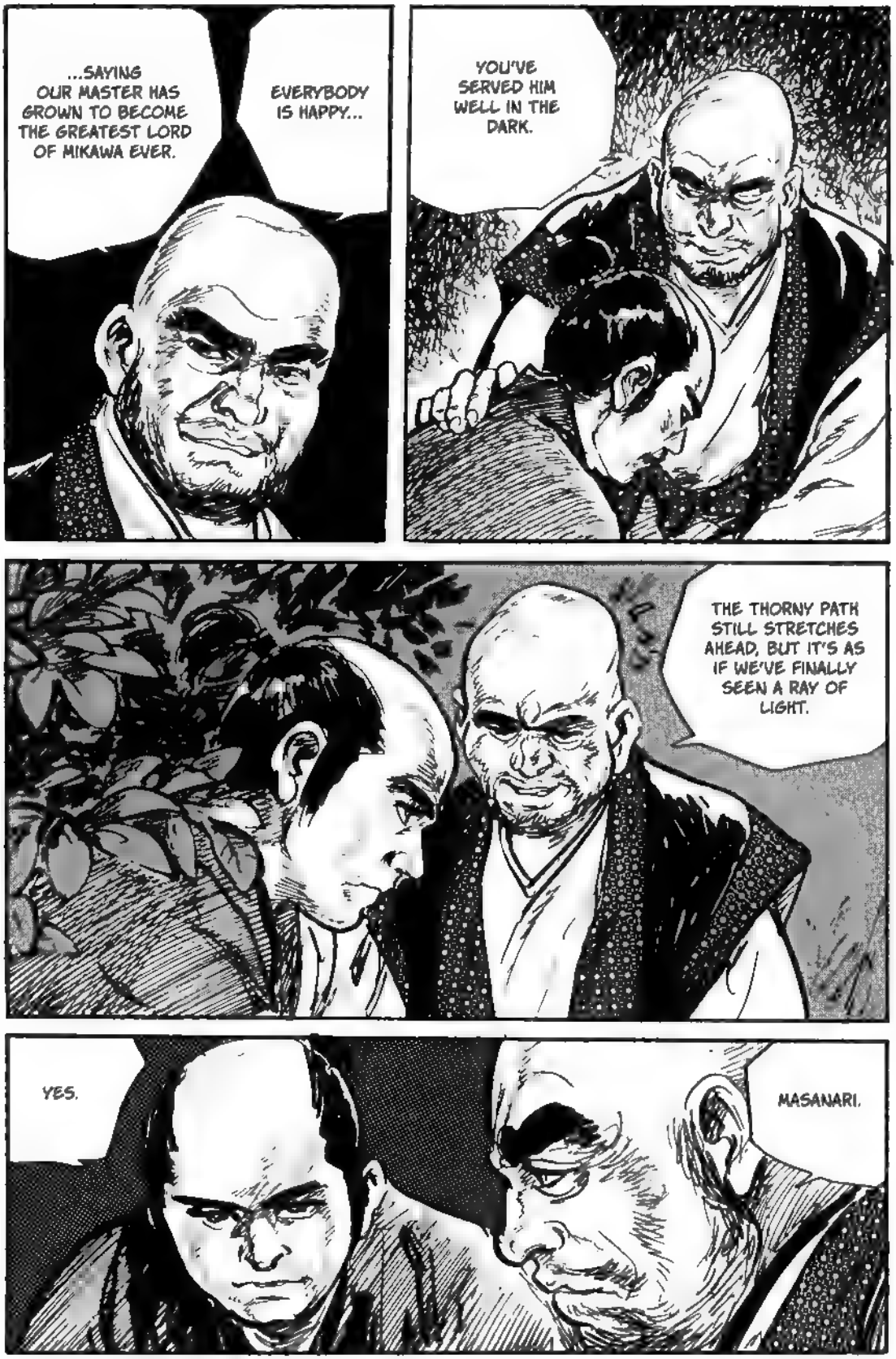
Chapter On Relinquishing Factions

No. 1: A Mountain Is a Problem- but a Horse Is, Too



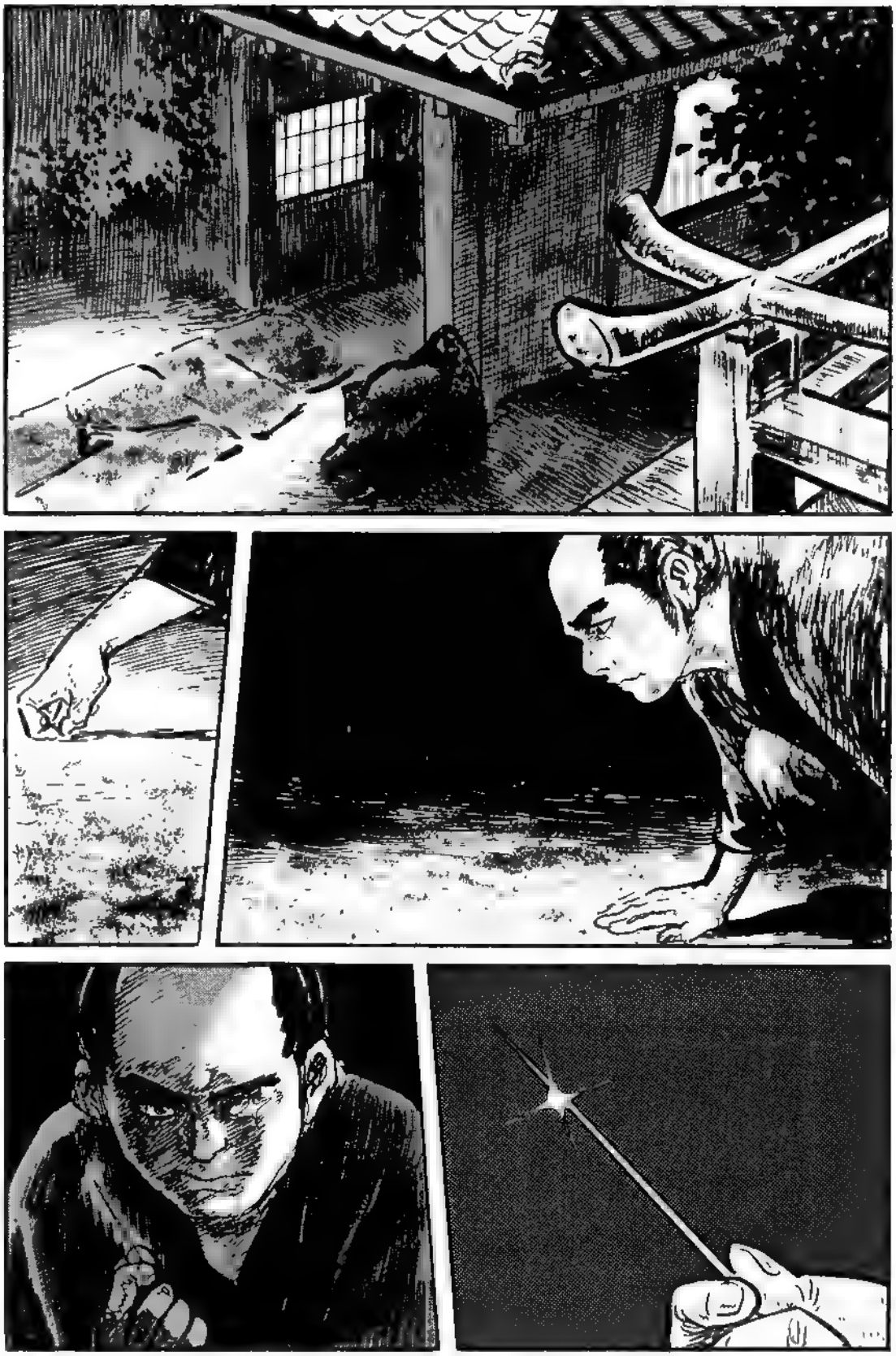


MASANARI
YES, SIR


...SAYING OUR MASTER HAS GROWN TO BECOME THE GREATEST LORD OF MIKAWA EVER.
EVERYBODY IS HAPPY...
YOU'VE SERVED HIM WELL IN THE DARK.
THE THORNY PATH STILL STRETCHES AHEAD, BUT IT'S AS IF WE'VE FINALLY SEEN A RAY OF LIGHT.
YES.
MASANARI.

MASANARI, YOU MUST BE TIRED, AND THE WORD HAS JUST BEEN GRANTED THAT YOU MAY TAKE A BREAK. BE GRATEFUL AND RELAX. IT'S BEEN A LONG WHILE SINCE YOU LEFT HOME.
FATHER.
BECAUSE AT THIS POINT, EVEN IF OUR LORD RETURNS WITH HIS MEN FROM MIKAWA, THOSE IN SUNPU WON'T OBJECT.
YOU PROBABLY NO LONGER NEED TO STAY HIDDEN. REVEAL YOURSELF AND SERVE HIM AS HIS CLOSE ATTENDANT FROM NOW ON.
DESPITE ORDERS FROM YOUR LORD, YOU WON'T RELAX THEN?
HMPH.
IF YOU STAND THERE, YOU BLOCK MY VIEW. WILL YOU MOVE ASIDE?

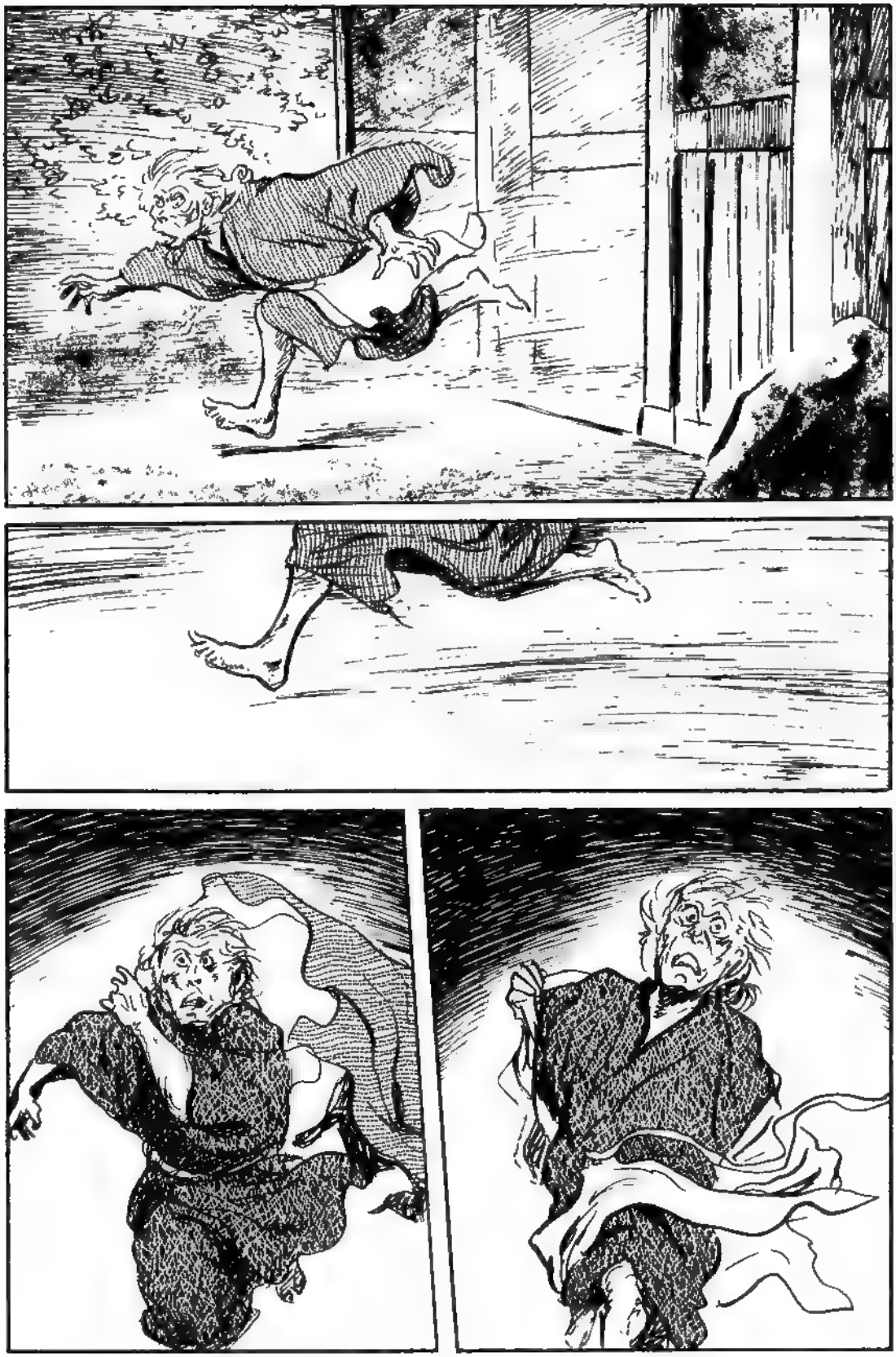
IF YOU AGREED TO QUIT YOUR POST...
HEH HEH HEH. YOU ARE MY SON.
IF IT IS AN ORDER, I WILL HEAR IT DIRECTLY.
STAND READY, AND DO NOT LOWER YOUR GUARD
SINCE OUR LORD DID NOT MOVE AS EXPECTED, ODA'S SPIES MAY SNEAK IN.
...YOU'D BE DEAD.
YES, SIR.

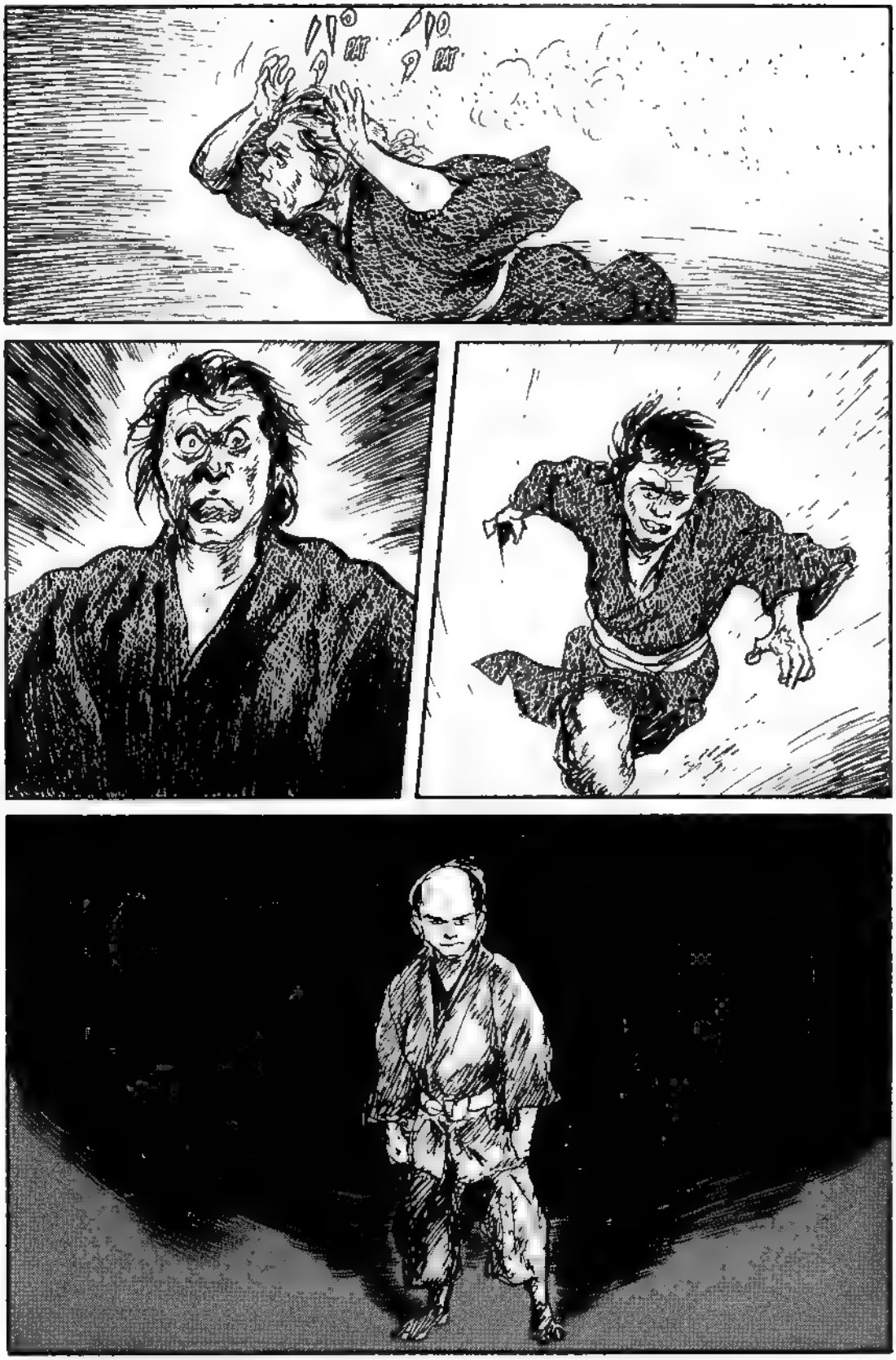


YES, SIR.
HE'S IN HIS SLEEPING QUARTERS. PLEASE BRING IT OVER.
THE LORD DESIRES SOME WARM PORRIDGE.
HEY... YOU.

EITHER WAY, WITHOUT CHECKING, I CAN'T GO BACK TO KIYOSU.
IF MOTONOBU-SAMA TURNS OUT TO BE A MOUNTAIN, IT'S A PROBLEM. BUT A HORSE IS A PROBLEM, TOO.
AW... AWWW.

WHY WOULD I DROP IT IN A PLACE I'VE NEVER BEEN?
I NEVER CAME THROUGH HERE BEFORE...
IT LOOKS LIKE MY NEEDLE... BUT, HMM...

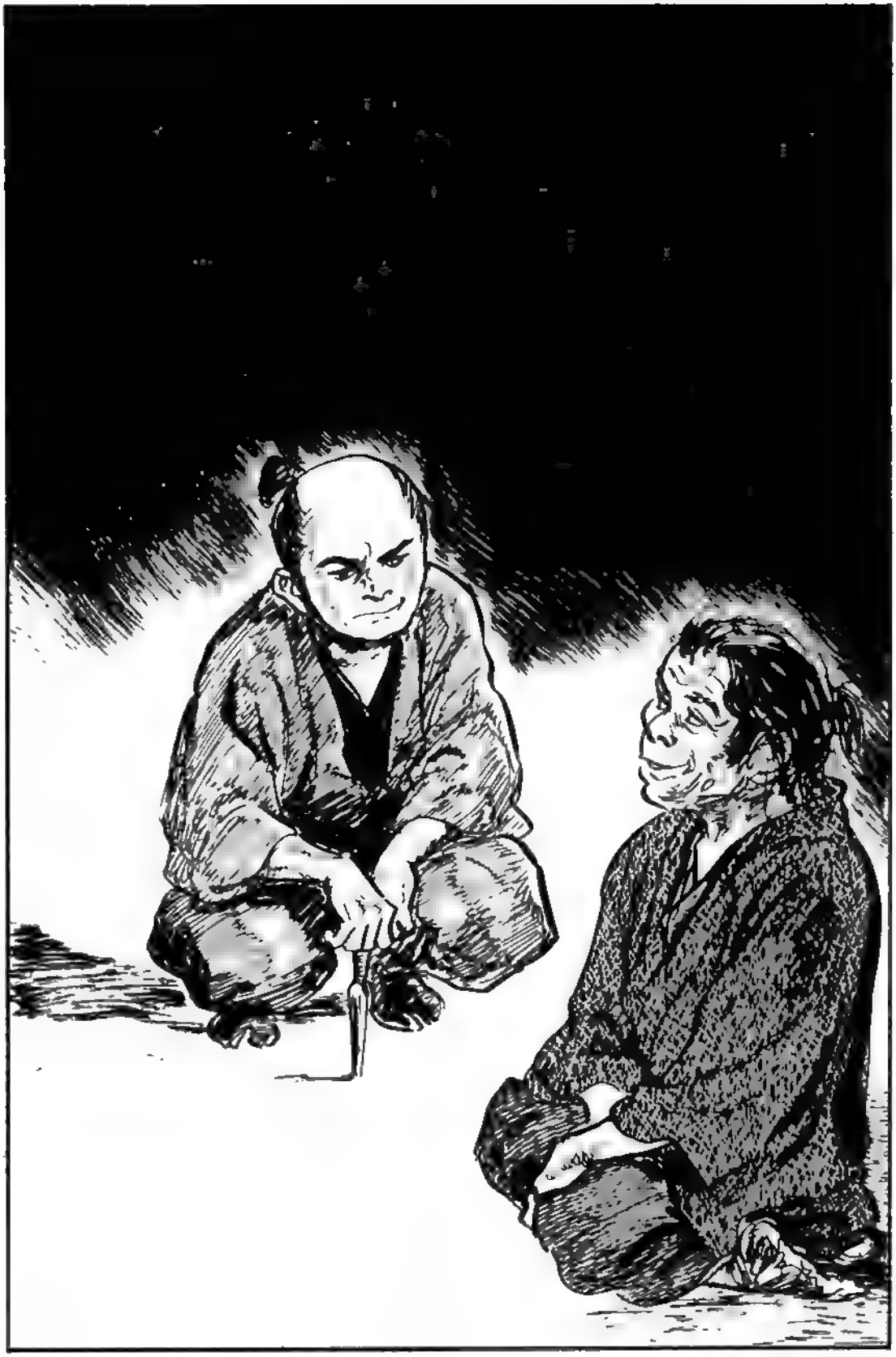



PAT
PAT

HEE HEE HEE. I KNEW I'D BEEN DETECTED.
INDEED, I AM A *SUPPA* OF ODA-- HIYOSHI, THE NEEDLE PEDDLER.
H... HOLD IT.
BUT WAIT. I WON'T RUN AND HIDE.

YES, I DID
AT LEAST ANSWER ME, WILL YOU?
YOU'RE THE ONE WHO SET THE NEEDLE, AREN'T YOU?
IF YOU ARE A *SUPPA*, YOU WON'T TALK NO MATTER HOW I ASK
KILL ME?
WHAT WILL YOU DO NOW?
I DON'T HAVE ANY SKILL THAT WOULD HELP ME IN COMBAT.
WHY WON'T YOU FIGHT?
HECK, I'LL TELL YOU WHATEVER YOU WANT.

OH. CUT IT OUT I DON'T WANNA DIE
THEN TAKE YOUR OWN LIFE. THAT'S WHAT A SUPPA WOULD-
HEY LET ME ASK YOU WILL YOU LET ME SEE MOTONOBU-DONO IN PERSON?



IF YOU LET ME SEE MOTONOBU-DONO...
...
...
YOU KNOW, IT'S A TRADE.
...I'LL LET YOU SEE NOBUNAGA-SAMA. HOW ABOUT IT?

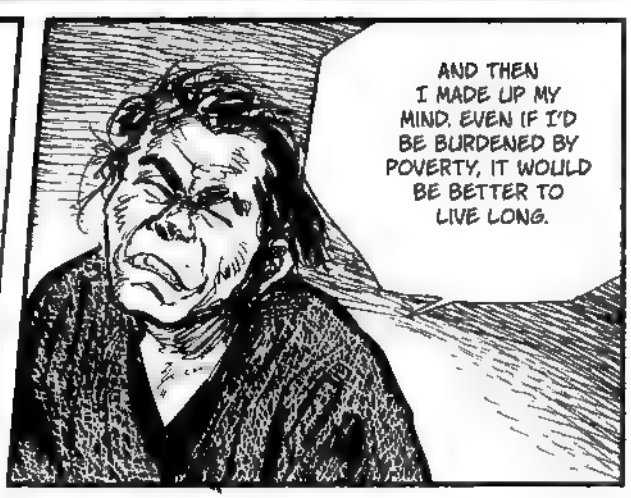
DO YOU HAVE ANY PROOF?
I'M NOT LYING.
THAT'LL MAKE IT FIFTY-FIFTY.
THIS IS HERS.
THERE'S A GIRL I'M DEADLY IN LOVE WITH.

FROM HER PRIVATES.
FROM HER VAGINA.
HER HAIR.

LOOK AT THEM CLOSELY. I'M ALLOWING YOU THE PRIVILEGE.
FROM A JAPANESE WOMAN, BUT SMOOTH AND STRAIGHT.
STRANGE, EH?
THEY'RE NOT FRIZZY, ARE THEY?
I READ IN A BOOK FROM CHINA THAT IF YOU GET A BRIDE WITH STRAIGHT HAIR DOWN THERE, YOU'LL END UP LOSING LOTS OF GOLD.

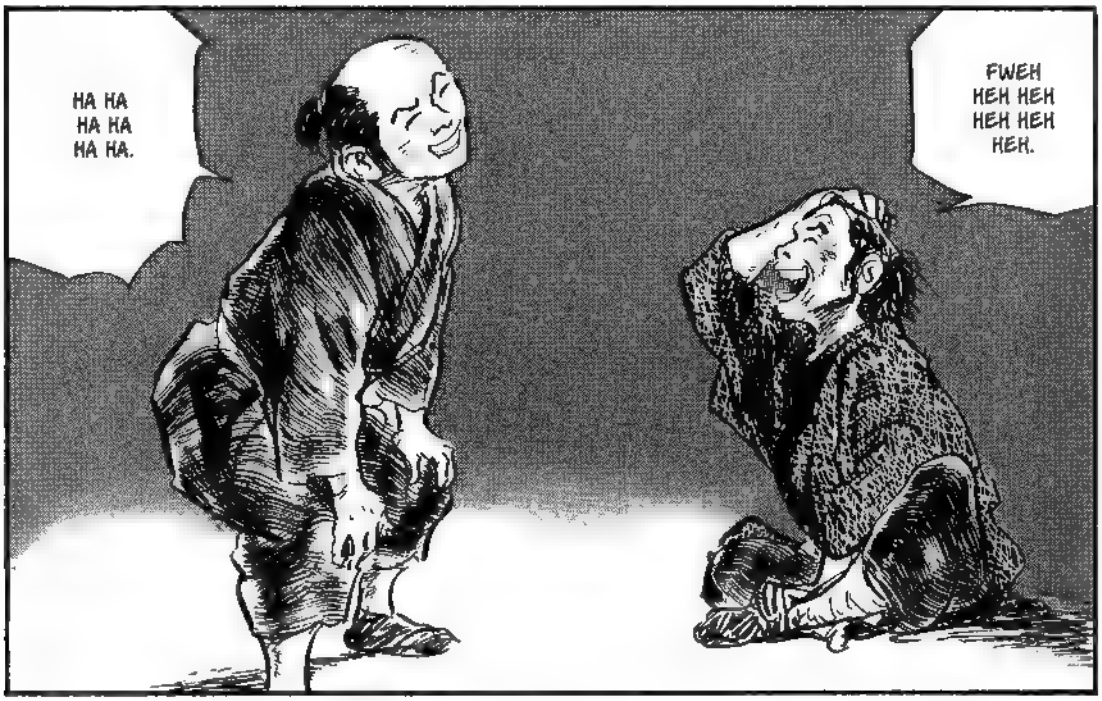
SO I WEIGHED WHAT IT MEANT AT SOME LENGTH.
BUT LISTEN TO THIS. IT ALSO SAYS, EVEN THOUGH YOU WILL LOSE THE GOLD, YOU WILL LIVE A FULL LIFE.

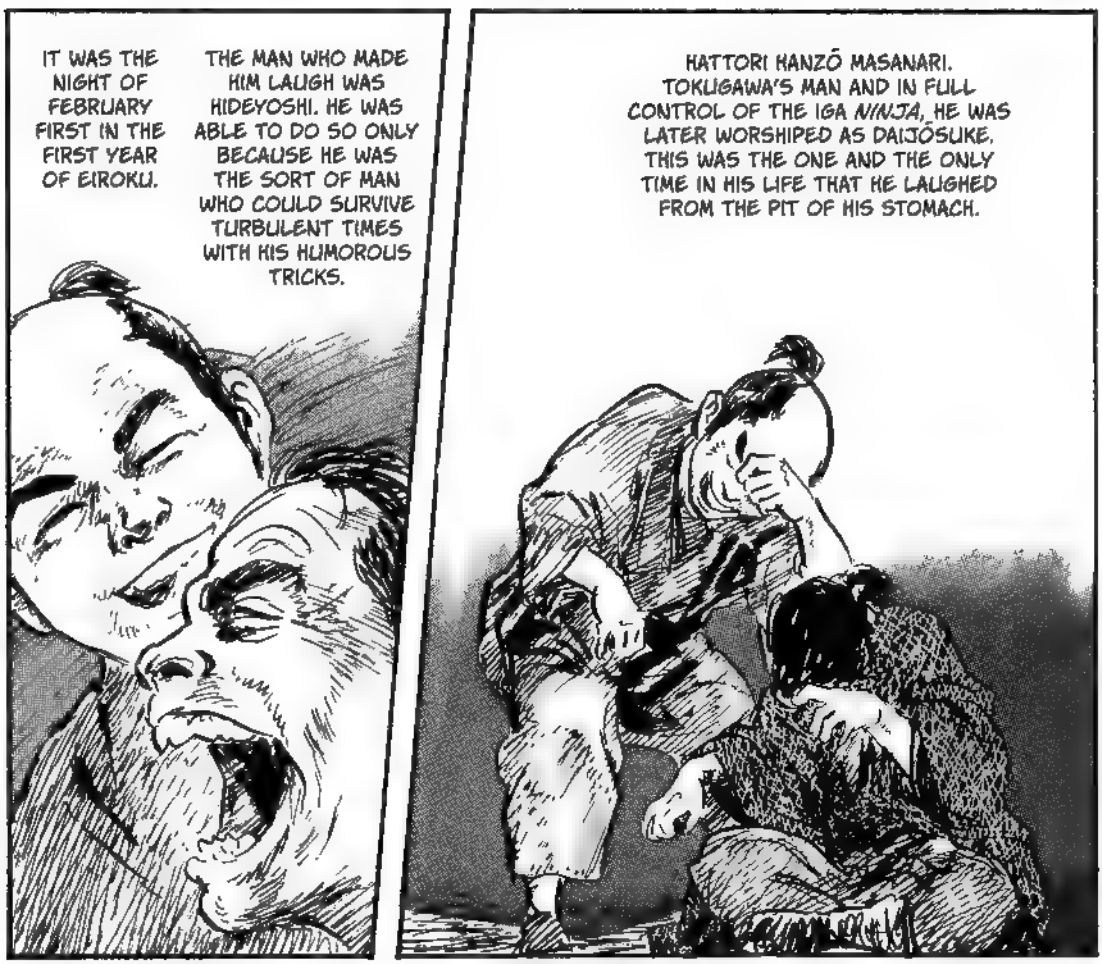
WE'RE IN THE TIME OF WARRING STATES, AFTER ALL.


AND THEN I MADE UP MY MIND. EVEN IF I'D BE BURDENED BY POVERTY, IT WOULD BE BETTER TO LIVE LONG.

ANYWAY, I GOTTA GET PROMOTED AND MAKE MORE MONEY FOR HER.
OH! THE HAIR!
CHOO
OH NO...

I'M SAVED.
PHEW.
HORSE'S TAIL CAN BE QUITE USEFUL SOMETIMES.
I SURE AM GLAD THAT MURDEROUS LOOK IS OFF YOUR FACE.
HA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA HA.

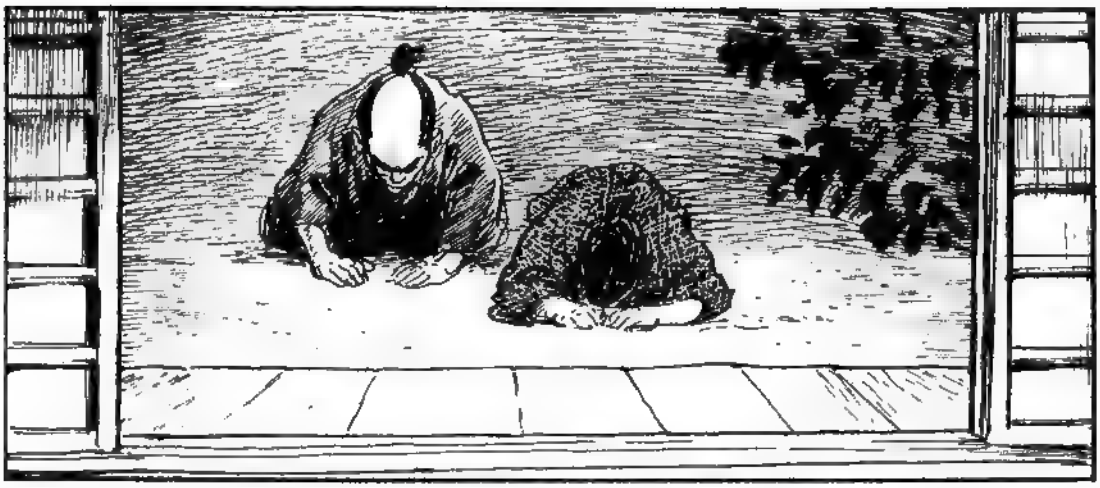

HA HA
HA HA
HA HA.
FWEH
HEH HEH
HEH HEH
HEH.


IT WAS THE NIGHT OF FEBRUARY FIRST IN THE FIRST YEAR OF EIROKU.
THE MAN WHO MADE HIM LAUGH WAS HIDEYOSHI. HE WAS ABLE TO DO SO ONLY BECAUSE HE WAS THE SORT OF MAN WHO COULD SURVIVE TURBULENT TIMES WITH HIS HUMOROUS TRICKS.
HATTORI HANZŌ MASANARI. TOKUGAWA'S MAN AND IN FULL CONTROL OF THE IGA *NINJA*, HE WAS LATER WORSHIPED AS DAIJŌSUKE. THIS WAS THE ONE AND THE ONLY TIME IN HIS LIFE THAT HE LAUGHED FROM THE PIT OF HIS STOMACH.

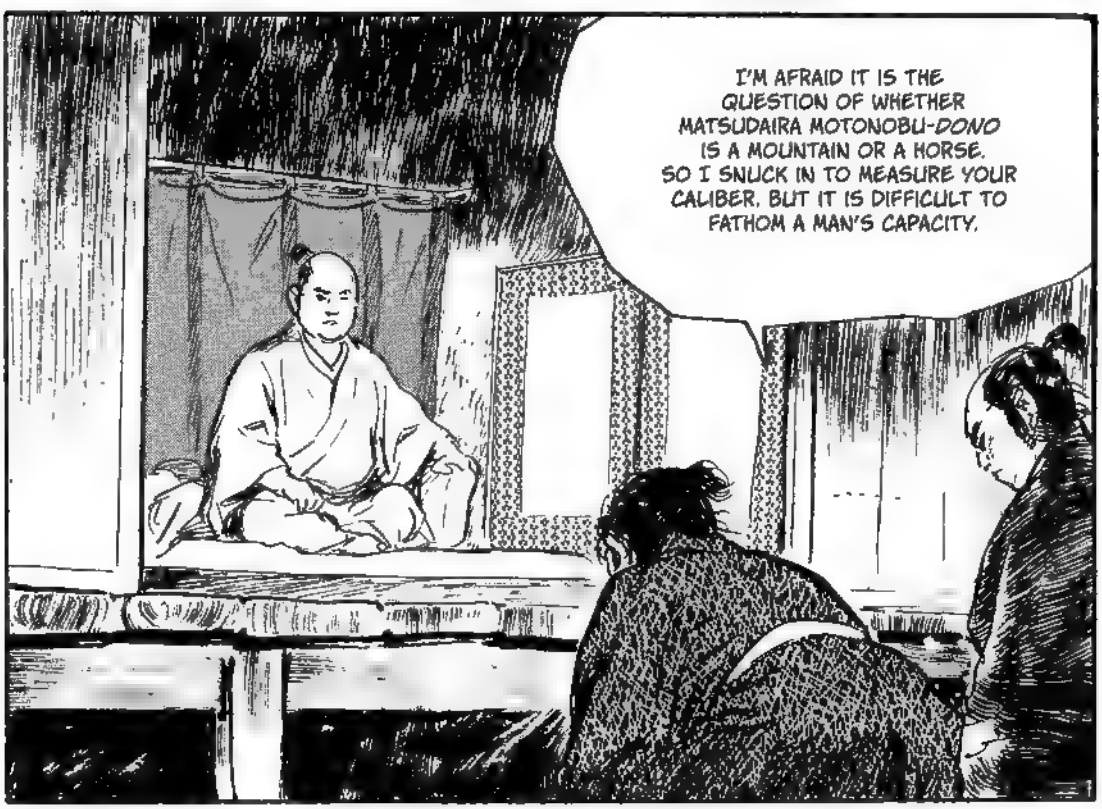
BA
この者、余の耳と足なり
信長
THIS MAN IS
MY EARS AND LEGS.
NOBUNAGA

THIS IS THE PROOF.
THIS MAN IS MY EARS AND LEGS, IT SAYS.
WHY DO YOU WISH TO SEE MY LORD?
IF YOU LET ME SEE MOTONOBU-*DONO*, I'LL LET YOU SEE NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* ANYTIME.
?!
IF MOTONOBU-*SAMA* IS A MOUNTAIN, IT'S A PROBLEM. BUT A HORSE IS, TOO.

PHEE HA HA HA
HEE HA HA HA HA HA
HEE HA HA HA HA HA
HANZŌ'S SNORT BLEW AWAY THE HAIR, EH?
AND THEY WERE HORSE HAIRS.
HA HA HA HA HA.



SO, HIYOSHI, NEEDLE PEDDLER, WHAT BUSINESS DO YOU HAVE WITH ME?
YOU'RE TRULY AN UNUSUAL MAN.


I'M AFRAID IT IS THE QUESTION OF WHETHER MATSUDAIRA MOTONOBU-*DONO* IS A MOUNTAIN OR A HORSE. SO I SNUCK IN TO MEASURE YOUR CALIBER. BUT IT IS DIFFICULT TO FATHOM A MAN'S CAPACITY.

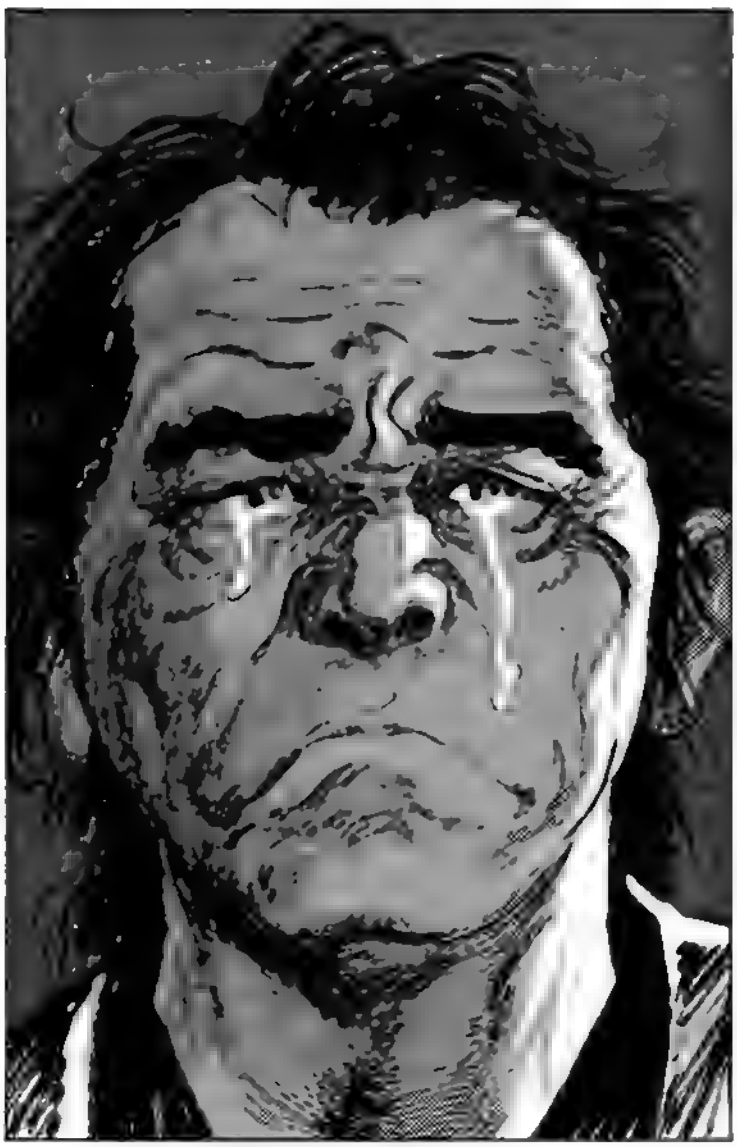
I FIGURED I MIGHT AS WELL MEET YOU IN PERSON, AND ACCORDINGLY, I HAVE COME FORTH.
YES, INDEED.
THE MOUNTAIN MEANS THAT WHICH DOES NOT MOVE, AND THE HORSE MEANS THAT WHICH RUNS. IS THAT IT?
...I DID NOT MOVE, AND THEREFORE YOU WANT TO KNOW WHY. IS THIS CORRECT?
NOBUNAGA-*DONO'S* ATTACK AGAINST ODAKA CASTLE WAS MEANT TO LURE ME OUT. DESPITE THAT...

BUT IT'S ALSO A PROBLEM IF I CHARGE LIKE A HORSE, FORGETTING TO THINK.
IT'S A PROBLEM IF, DRIVEN BY FEAR, I NEVER MOVE.
VERY INSIGHTFUL.
I DID NOT MOVE BECAUSE I SAW TOMORROW, BECAUSE OF HANZÖ.
YES. EITHER WILL PROVE TO BE DIFFICULT FOR THE FUTURE OF ODA.
AND YOU KNEW THAT YOSHIMOTO GAVE YOU PERMISSION TO VISIT THE GRAVES OF YOUR ANCESTORS JUST TO GAUGE YOU.
MOTONOBU-*SAMA*, YOU KNEW THE FORCES OF IMAGAWA WERE IN IWAZU, AWAITING ORDERS.

YOUR FRANK DISCLOSURE HONORS ME MORE THAN I DESERVE.
MY LORD.
UH-KUH.
A MOUNTAIN IS A PROBLEM. BUT A HORSE IS, TOO... ...I SEE.
AND TO A MONKEY LIKE THIS MAN...?
BUT WHY DID MY LORD REVEAL HIS MIND SO OPENLY?

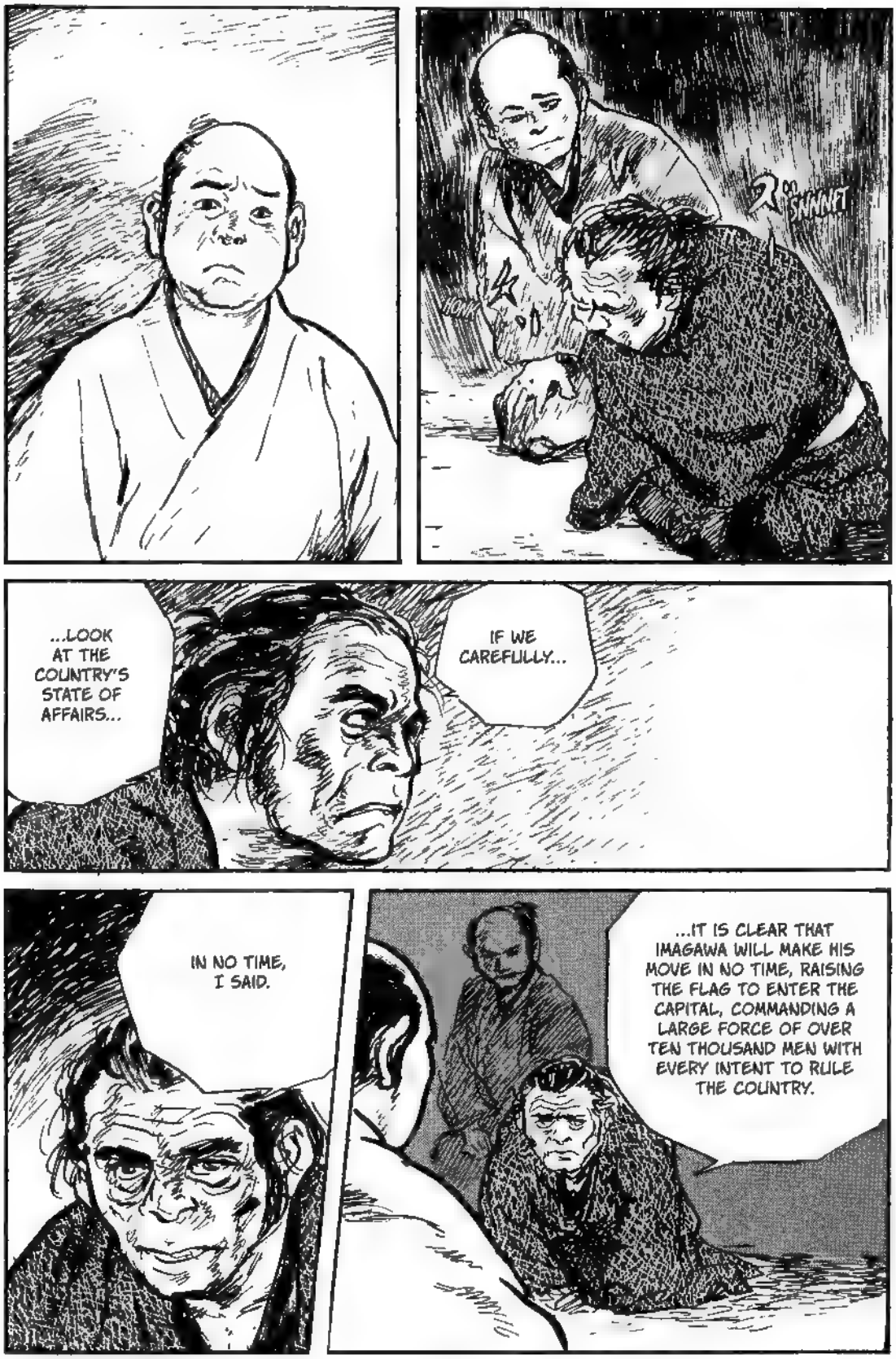
Chapter On Relinquishing Factions

No. 2: Monkey and Pull



MOTONOBU-DONO,
I CANNOT STOP MY TEARS,
THINKING HOW MUCH HARDER
YOUR POSITION WILL BECOME
ONCE YOU GO BACK
TO IMAGAWA.

WHY ARE
YOU CRYING,
KIYOSHI?


SHNNFT
...LOOK AT THE COUNTRY'S STATE OF AFFAIRS...
IF WE CAREFULLY...
IN NO TIME, I SAID.
...IT IS CLEAR THAT IMAGAWA WILL MAKE HIS MOVE IN NO TIME, RAISING THE FLAG TO ENTER THE CAPITAL, COMMANDING A LARGE FORCE OF OVER TEN THOUSAND MEN WITH EVERY INTENT TO RULE THE COUNTRY.

AND BECAUSE ODA STANDS ON THE PATH TO THE CAPITAL...
...IN NO TIME, IMAGAWA AND ODA WILL OPEN UP THE CAULDRON OF WAR.

NO.
DO YOU THINK NOBUNAGA-SAMA WOULD SURRENDER, CLEARING THE PATH FOR IMAGAWA TO GO TO THE CAPITAL?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
WHAT THEN?
I MEAN, MOTONOBU-SAMA, YOUR POSITION.
AND THAT MEANS, WITHOUT A DOUBT, YOU WILL BE ORDERED TO BEGIN THE CAMPAIGN
INDEED.
IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING, DOESN'T IT? WITH WHAT YOU DID, I BELIEVE YOU GAINED YOSHIMOTO'S FULL TRUST.

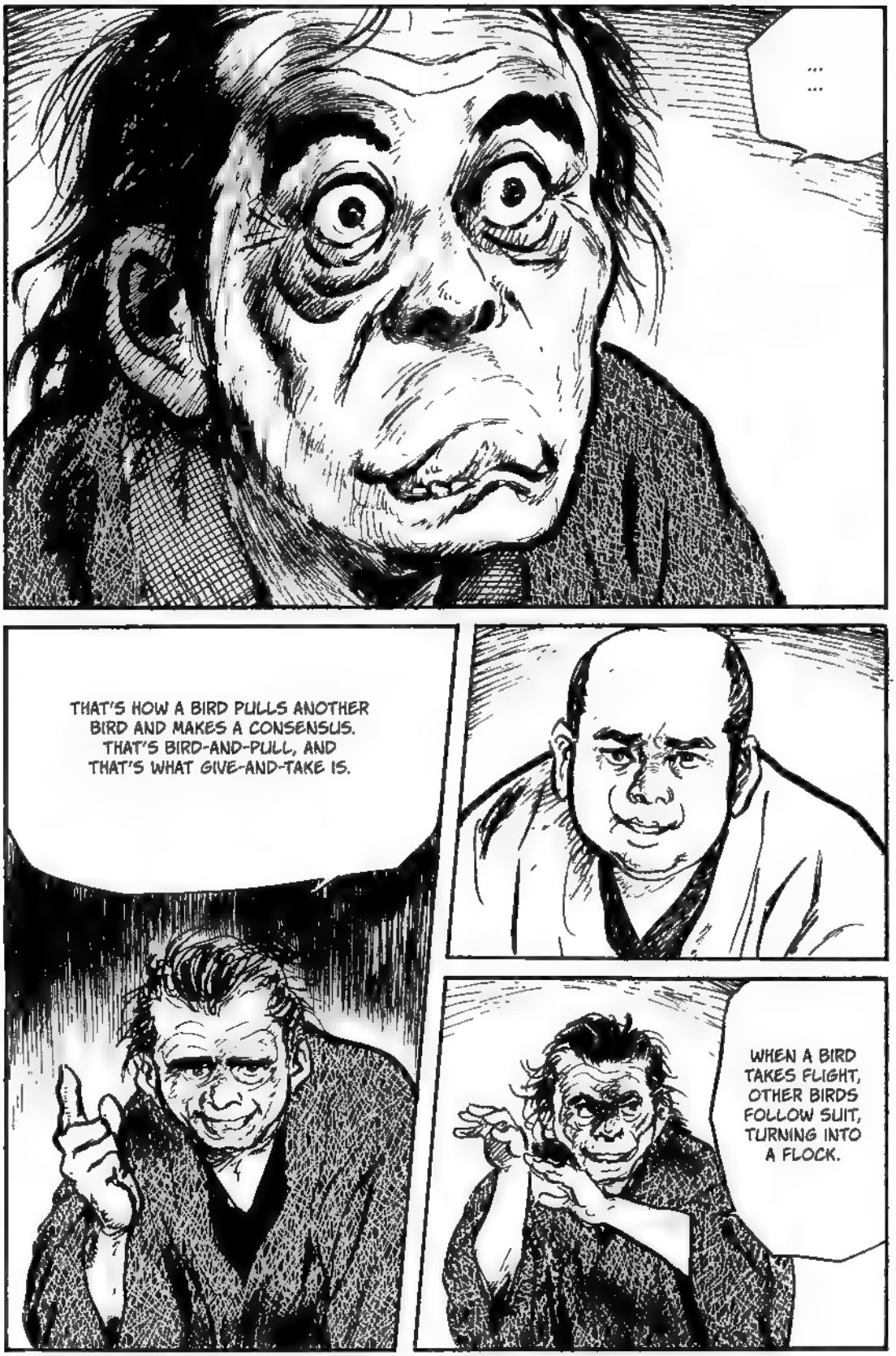
THE MIKAWA FORCE WHICH MOTONOBU-SAMA COMMANDS WILL ALWAYS HAVE TO STAND AT THE FOREFRONT.
IT WON'T BE THE ONLY BATTLE. THE NEXT ONE AND THE ONE AFTER NEXT.
HMM.
KM...
...
...
...
...
YOU'RE NO MORE THAN A GARDEN ROCK.
FOR IMAGAWA, THE MATSUDAIRA MIKAWA FORCES ARE OUTSIDERS. NO MATTER HOW MUCH MOTONOBU-DONO GAINS YOSHIMOTO'S TRUST, YOU'LL NEVER BE ANYTHING BUT A LACKEY.

LET ME PUT IT THIS WAY. YOU ARE DISPOSABLE GOODS. BE IT FIRE OR WATER, YOUR MEN WILL JUMP IN WILLINGLY ON BEHALF OF IMAGAWA ONCE IMAGAWA PROMISES THAT YOU MAY GO BACK TO OKAZAKI IN TIME.
BESIDES, IT'S TO IMAGAWA'S ADVANTAGE TO MAKE GOOD USE OF THE FEARLESS MIKAWA FORCES.
...
...
END OF STORY.
IMAGAWA'S MANURE IS ALL YOU'LL BE.
CLAP
...UNTIL NO ONE'S LEFT STANDING.
THEN, YOU LOSE ONE, TEN, A HUNDRED...
IMAGAWA AND YOSHIMOTO. I UTTERED THESE NAMES WITHOUT HONORIFICS, EVEN THOUGH THEY'RE WHOM YOU SERVE NOW. ARE YOU NOT UPSET?
WHAT A DIFFICULT POSITION YOU'RE IN, MOTONOBU-SAMA.

...YOU'RE DEAD.
NOW THAT I'VE DISCLOSED MY THOUGHTS...
BUT I CHANGE MY MIND.
SSSST

PLEASE PARDON MY INSOLENCE, I BEG YOU.
I KNEW YOU WEREN'T THE SORT OF MAN WHO'D KILL ME. AND SO I SAID WHAT I DID.
...
...
IN THE EVENT OF WAR BETWEEN IMAGAWA AND ODA, WHICH SIDE DO YOU THINK WILL WIN?
IF IMAGAWA WINS, YOU AND THE *SAMURAI* WARRIORS OF MIKAWA WILL HAVE NO TOMORROW!
BUT MOTONOBU-*SAMA*
YOU MAY THINK IT'S NOT YOUR PROBLEM, AND THUS, NO NEED TO DWELL UPON IT.

BUT LET ME TELL YOU THIS ONE THING.
NO, NOT AT ALL.
ARE YOU TELLING ME TO BETRAY IMAGAWA?
BUT IF ODA WINS, YOU SHALL NO LONGER BE A LACKEY, BUT INSTEAD YOU WILL BECOME AN ALLY WHO'LL ASPIRE TO RULE THE COUNTRY HAND IN HAND.
I PROMISE YOU THAT, BECAUSE KEEPING YOU ALIVE CARRIES WEIGHT FOR ODA'S TOMORROW.
IN THE EVENT THAT MOTONOBU-*SAMA* IS SENT TO THE FOREFRONT, ODA WILL TRY AND AVOID YOU IF POSSIBLE.
I WONDER WHAT HE'LL CALL YOU, MOTONOBU-*SAMA*.
NOBUNAGA-*SAMA* CALLS ME BALDY RAT.
IT MAY SOUND ODD THAT I SAY THIS MYSELF, BUT I LOOK LIKE A MONKEY.


...
...
THAT'S HOW A BIRD PULLS ANOTHER BIRD AND MAKES A CONSENSUS. THAT'S BIRD-AND-PULL, AND THAT'S WHAT GIVE-AND-TAKE IS.
WHEN A BIRD TAKES FLIGHT, OTHER BIRDS FOLLOW SUIT, TURNING INTO A FLOCK.

GIVE AND TAKE IS A FIFTY-FIFTY DEAL. BUT IF IT'S ME, IT WOULD BE MONKEY-AND-PULL.
I HOPE YOU SHALL NOT FORGET IT.
ZO ZO
AND THE MONKEY IS THE LEAVE OF LEAVE-AND-PULL. THE LEAVE IS FOR THE DANGER TO LEAVE AND FOR THE EVIL TO LEAVE.
LEAVE OF LEAVE-AND-PULL IS THE SECRET PRINCIPLE OF WAR.
PLEASE EXCUSE ME.
I SHALL TAKE MY LEAVE.

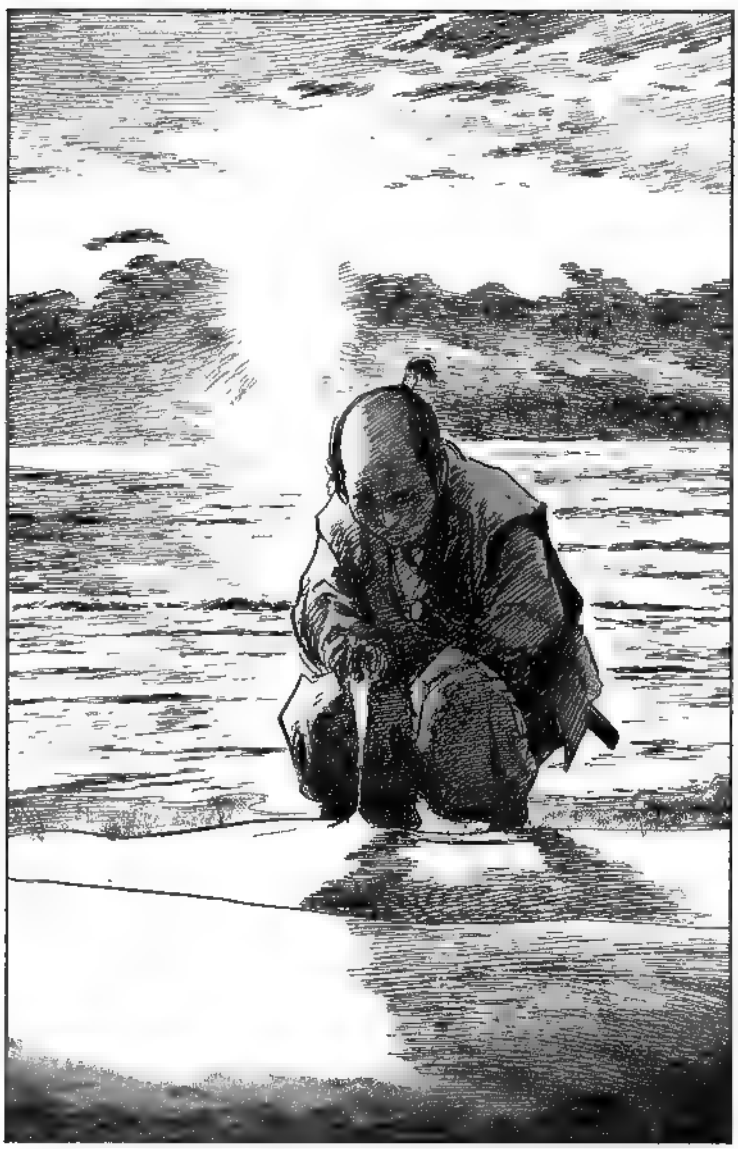
SEE YA.
I WILL LET YOU SEE NOBUNAGA-SAMA WHENEVER YOU WANT, I PROMISE YOU.
THAT MONKEY...
IS ANYTHING THE MATTER, MILORD?

...MAYBE WE SHOULD'VE KILLED HIM.
THE WORLD IS BIG. NOBUNAGA-*DONO* CAN KEEP A MAN LIKE HIM AT HIS COMMAND, AND IMAGAWA...
I CAN SEE TOMORROW, BUT HE CAN SEE A YEAR AHEAD.
AND IMAGAWA...?!

I'M GOING TO SLEEP.
SO HEAVY

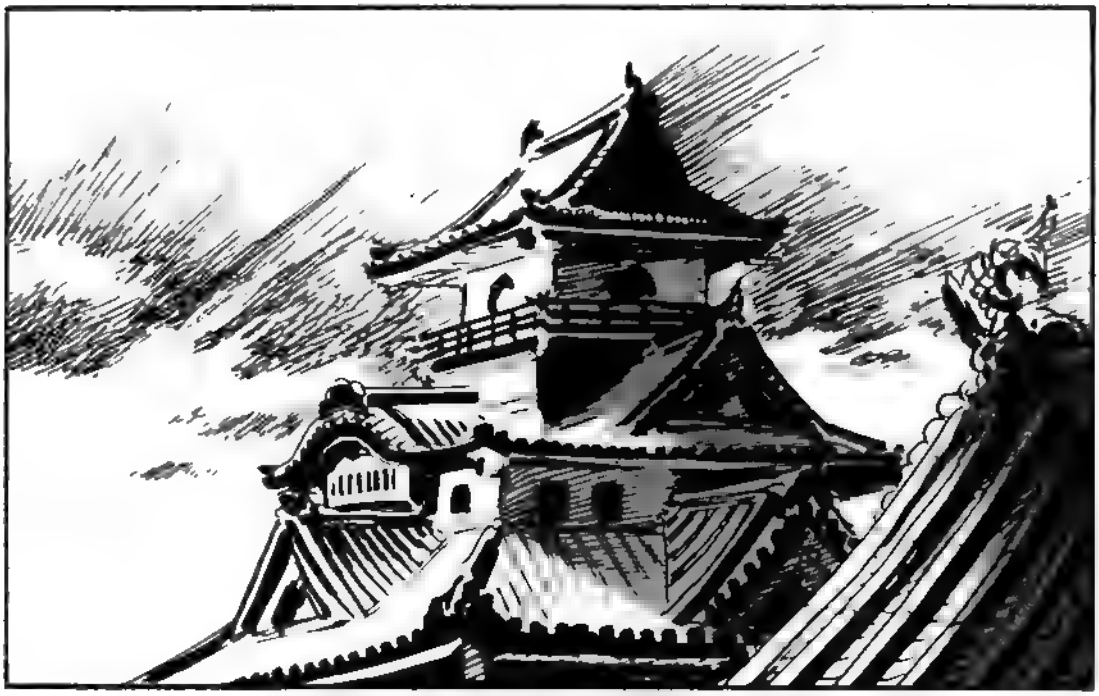
Chapter On Relinquishing Factions

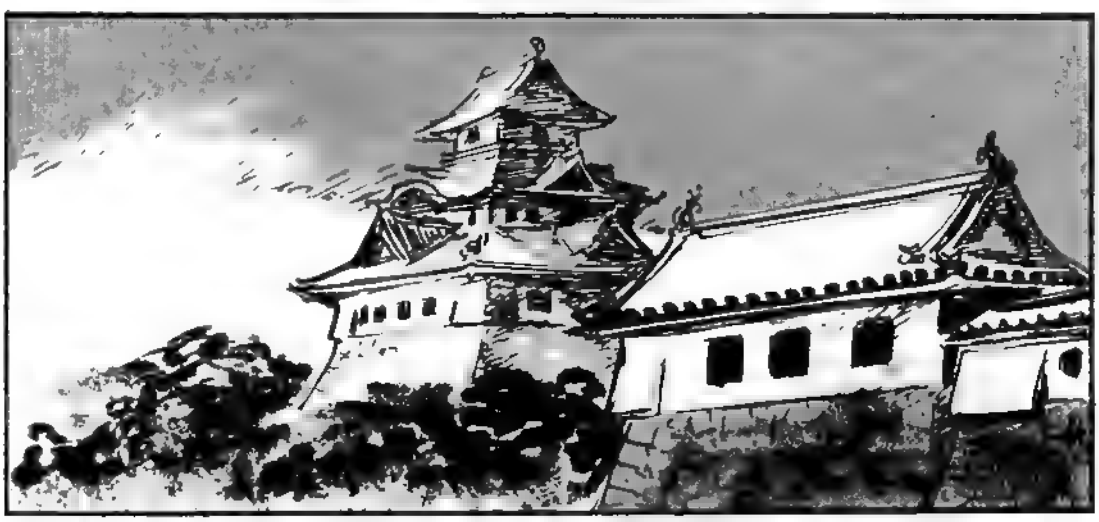
No. 3: Sand and Flower



HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
YOU'VE RETURNED.
HA HA HA HA HA HA. LOOK AT YOU.
YOU DID, INDEED.
AND BROUGHT ALONG MORE THAN A HUNDRED MEN. THE FAMOUS, FIERCE *SAMURAI* OF MIKAWA, EH?

YOU WON'T FIT IN THE ABODE OF MIYAMACHI. I'LL HAVE TO PREPARE A NEW PLACE RIGHT AWAY THAT'LL SUIT YOU BETTER, BUT FIRST LET'S FEAST.
ALL RIGHT.
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA HA HA
LET'S DRINK!





NO...

I'M SO HAPPY.
NOW I CAN SEE
YOU OUT IN
THE OPEN.

WHY...?
AND EVEN IF WE DO... WE MUST BECOME FORGOTTEN STRANGERS, EVEN THOUGH WE'LL STILL REMEMBER.
I DOUBT WE'LL SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN.
TH... THAT'S SELFISH!!
... TOO DIFFERENT.
OUR PATHS ARE...
TH... THAT'S...
THAT'S NO EXCUSE!!

NO.
IS IT BECAUSE YOU'RE A SAMURAI NOW?!
IS... IS IT BECAUSE YOU'VE RISEN IN STATUS?!
THAT'S GOTTA BE IT!!

ME, WHO GAVE MY CHASTITY AND LIFE TO YOU!!
YOU'RE GONNA TOSS ME! ME!
ME, WHO SAVED YOU!!

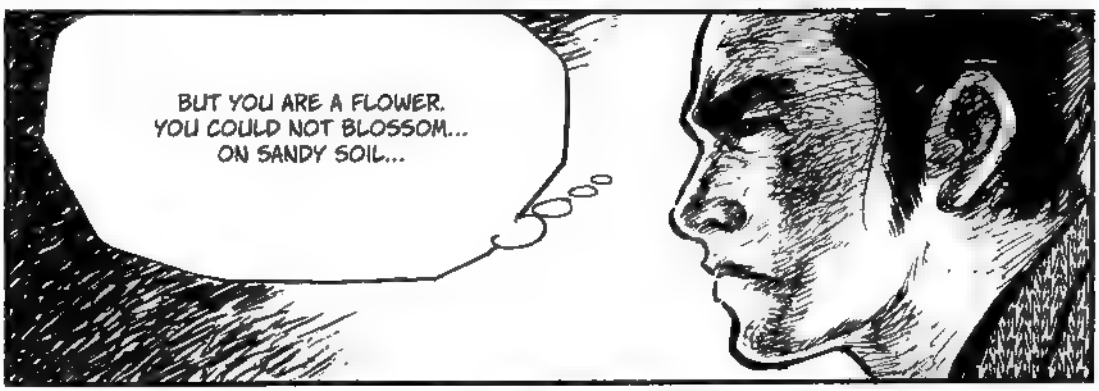
あ
AY
あ
AAAHHH
EVEN ABOUT HOW YOU KILLED THREE PATROLLING MEN!!
I'M GONNA TELL. YEAH, I WILL. I'M GONNA TELL EVERYONE WHAT HAPPENED!!

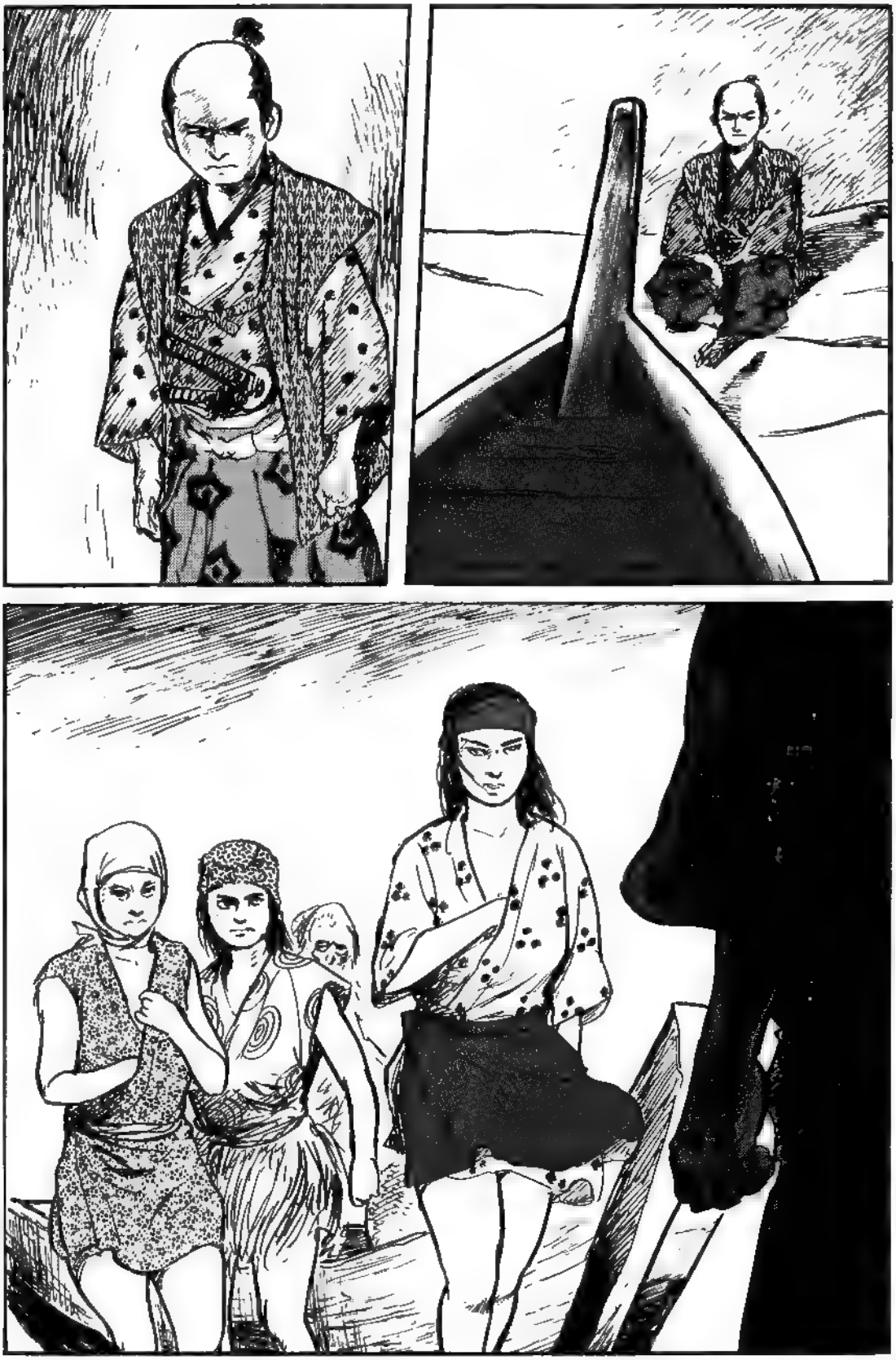
I HATE YOU!!
やあーーー
AAAHH

I AM SAND. YOU ARE A FLOWER.
DON'T DESERT ME.
I WANT YOU TO UNDER-STAND.
WAAAH

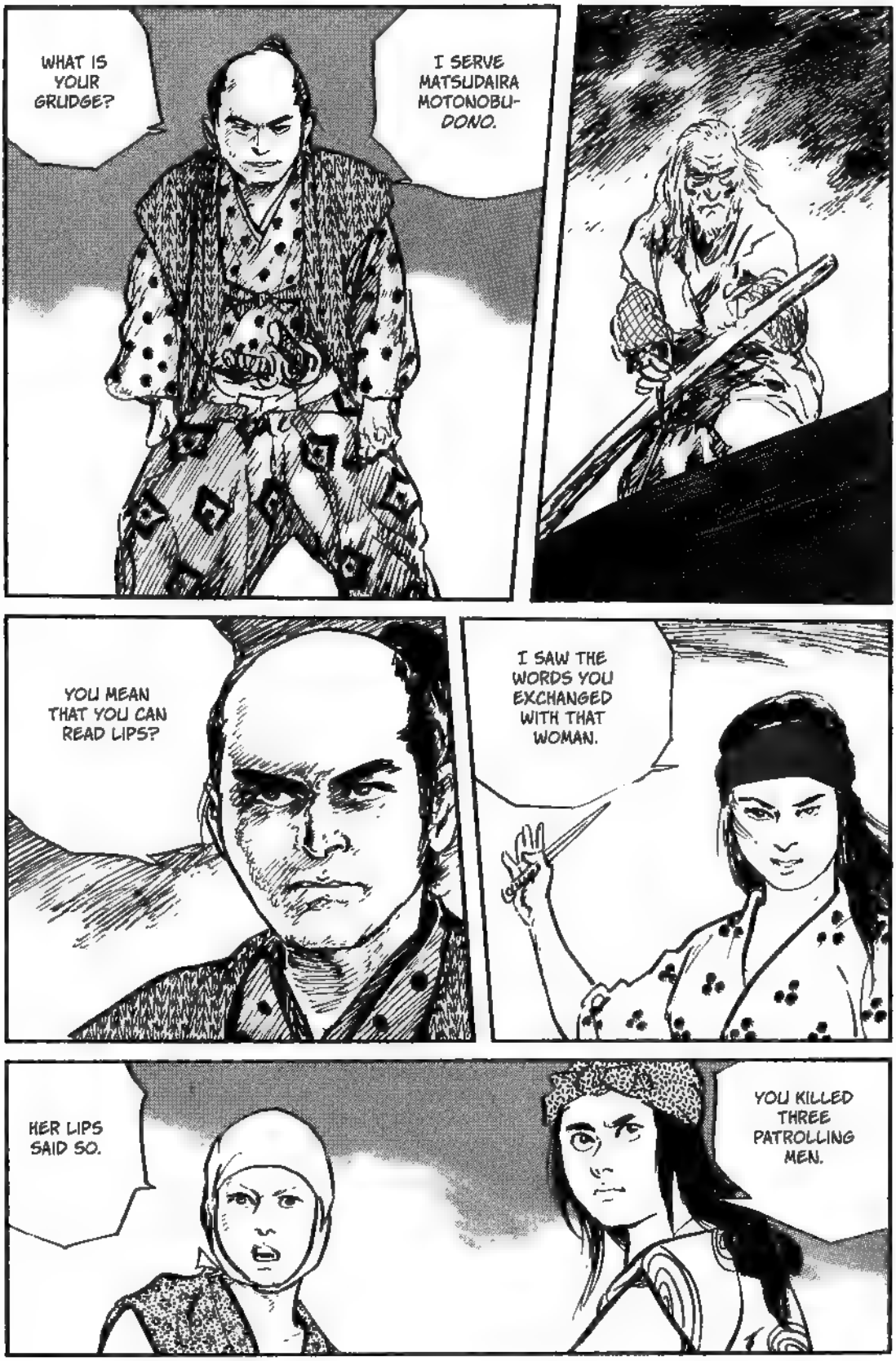
AAUGH
THERE'RE... THERE'RE STILL MANY... MANY MEN WHO WANT ME...
YOU MARK MY WORDS.
I'M GONNA TELL EVERYONE!
I'M GONNA TELL.
MANY OF THEM!!

I KNOW YOU WON'T TELL.
FORGIVE ME, AKUYA.
IF YOU ARE A WOMAN WHO COULD, I WOULD BE WITH YOU FOREVER... TOGETHER AS SAND.

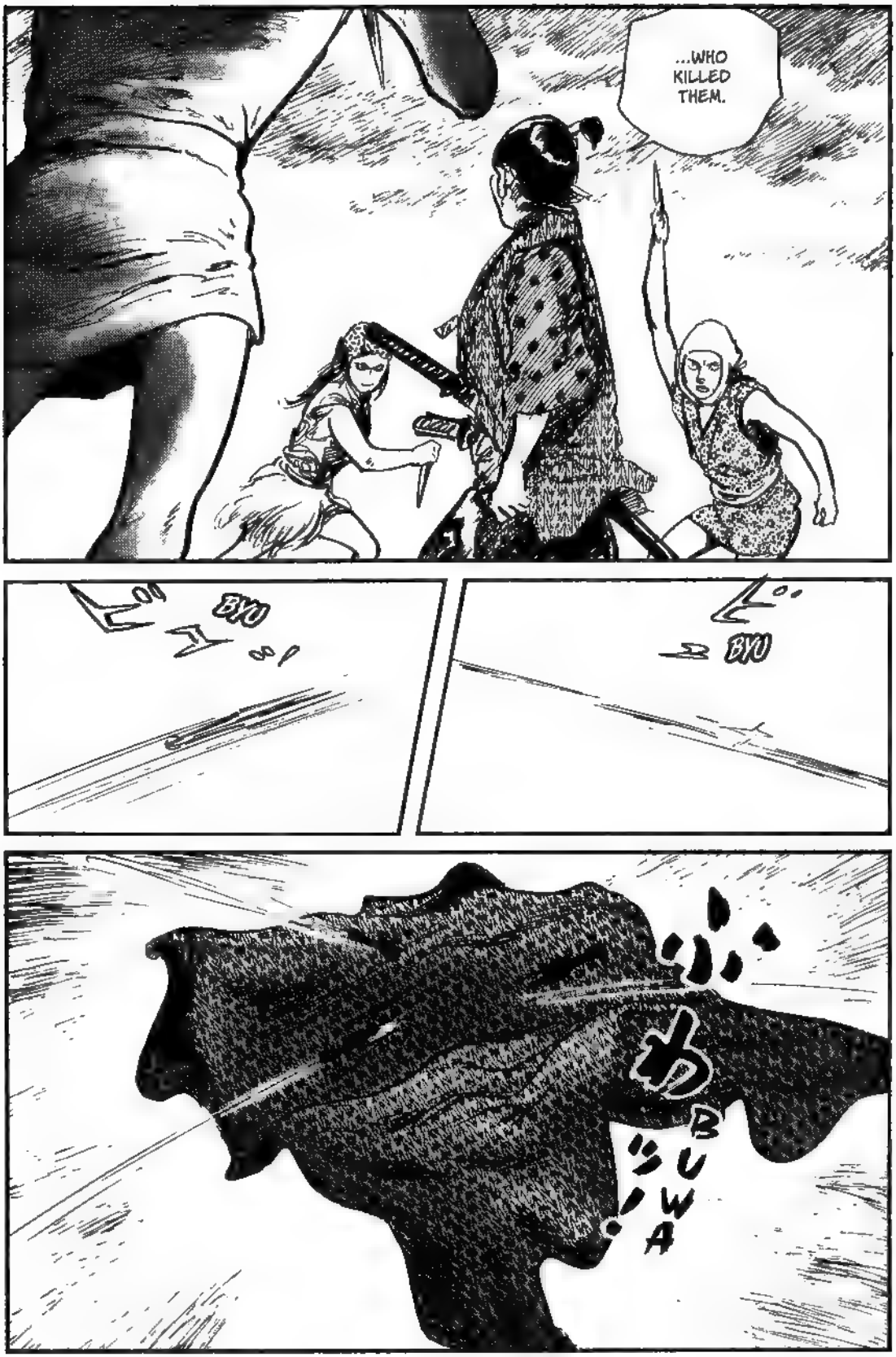

BUT YOU ARE A FLOWER. YOU COULD NOT BLOSSOM... ON SANDY SOIL...



AHH!!

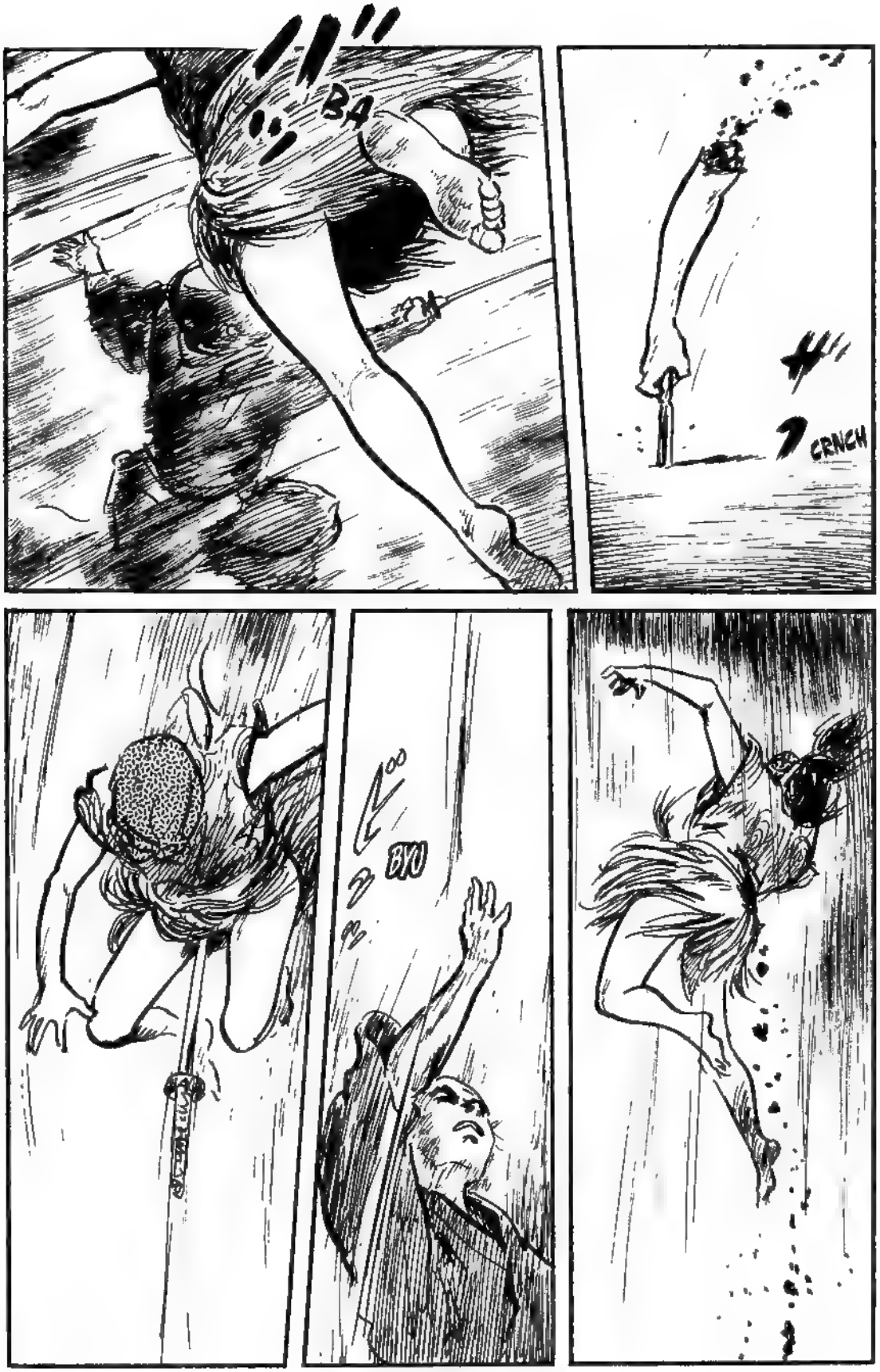

WHAT IS YOUR GRUDGE?
I SERVE MATSUDAIRA MOTONOBU-DONO.
YOU MEAN THAT YOU CAN READ LIPS?
I SAW THE WORDS YOU EXCHANGED WITH THAT WOMAN.
HER LIPS SAID SO.
YOU KILLED THREE PATROLLING MEN.

WE ARE THE WIVES OF UNKI, DAKKI, AND SAKKI, THE PATROL THAT DISAPPEARED.
...
...
WE ENTERED IMAGAWA TERRITORY TO LOOK FOR OUR MISSING HUSBANDS, AND IT'S BEEN ALREADY SEVEN DAYS SINCE.
WE ARE NOKIZARU KUNOICHI.
STILL, IT WAS I...
I HAD NO CHOICE IN THE MATTER...


...WHO KILLED THEM.
BYU
BYU
BUWA

DOSU

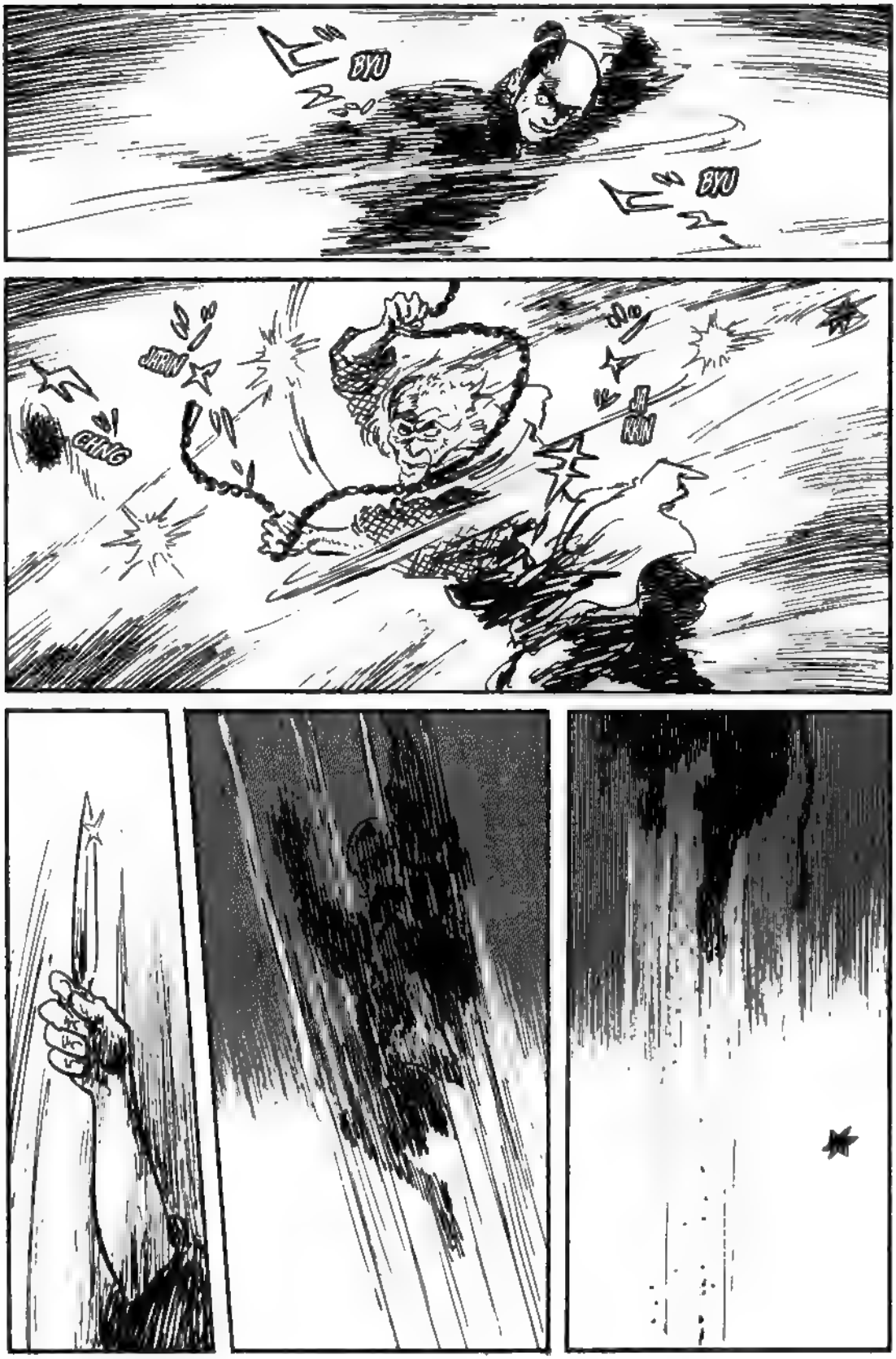
ドザッ
DOZA
ドバッ
BYU
BYU


BA
CRNCH

ぎゃあ！
GYAAHHH

IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT *KUNOICHI* COULDN'T DO IT YOU ARE THE ONE WHO KILLED MY BOYS AFTER ALL
HATTORI JŌKANNYŪDŌ OF IGA WOULD BE THE MAN WHO'S CAPABLE OF THAT BUT HE ISN'T YOUR AGE.
EXCELLENT MASTERY, INDEED.
I AM HANZŌ MASANARI
ARE YOU NYŪDŌ'S SON?

I AM HACHIYA SEKINEN, A *NOKIZARU*.
JARIN


BYU
BYU
JARIN
CHNG
JA
KKIN

TUNNG
CHINGG
THUD

URRGH...
SHOGYO MUJO, SHOHO MUGA, NEHAN JAKUJO.
UG...
DIE.

HGK...
GLAAH!

HMM... WHAT A TENACIOUS DOG.
URGG...

ガシャン
KLUD

ド…
DO
ズ…
ZU
GYUUU
H

ZAAA

HAA HAA
HANZŌ!!
I AM...
SAND...

HA...

THEY ARE TOO.
THEY ARE... SAND.
...A FLOWER
BUT YOU ARE...

LIVE AS SAND... DIE AS SAND...
SAND DOES NOT PRODUCE ANYTHING. IT CAN BLOOM NOTHING.
I CANNOT SET YOU ON SUCH BARREN SOIL.
BORN AS SAND ONLY TO RETURN TO SAND.

YOU ARE A FLOWER. YOU CAN LIVE AND BEAR CHILDREN. FISHING AND KEEPING HOUSE, YOU CAN BLOSSOM AND HAVE A LIFE OF HAPPINESS.
I AM THE SAND OF STEALTH. ALIVE OR DEAD, I SHALL CLAIM NO GLORY.
HOW COULD I ARRANGE SUCH FLOWER ON DEAD EARTH?
LOOK.

DO YOU WANT TO LET ME SOAK UP YOUR BLOOD AND LEAD A LIFE ONLY TO RETURN TO SAND?

...WE MUST BECOME FORGOTTEN STRANGERS.
EVEN THOUGH WE'LL STILL REMEMBER...
FAREWELL...
...AKUYA.
ZUUN
SHOOT

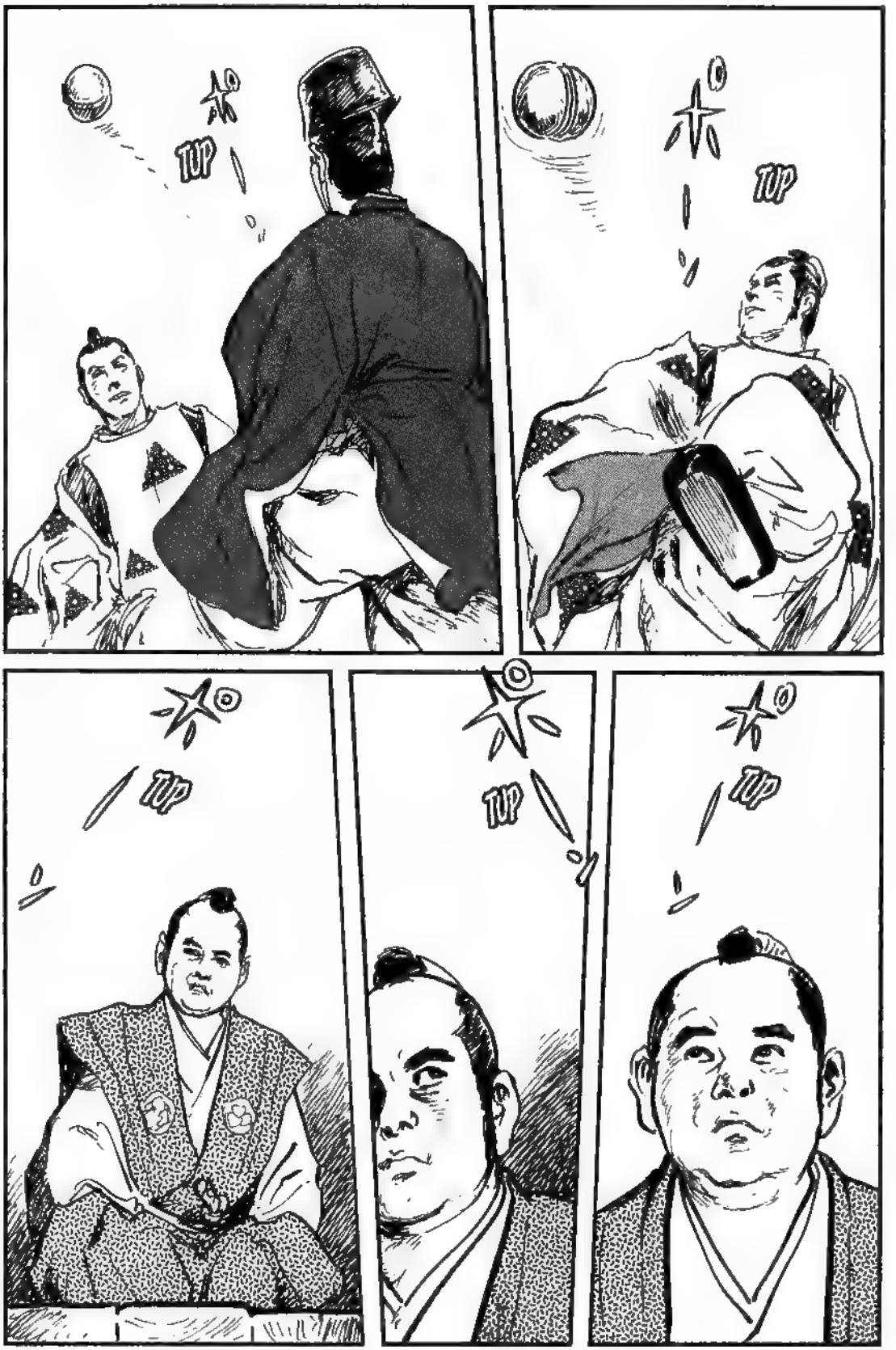
Chapter On Relinquishing Factions

No. 4: Fire Attack

ZAAA
ZAAA

ZAAA

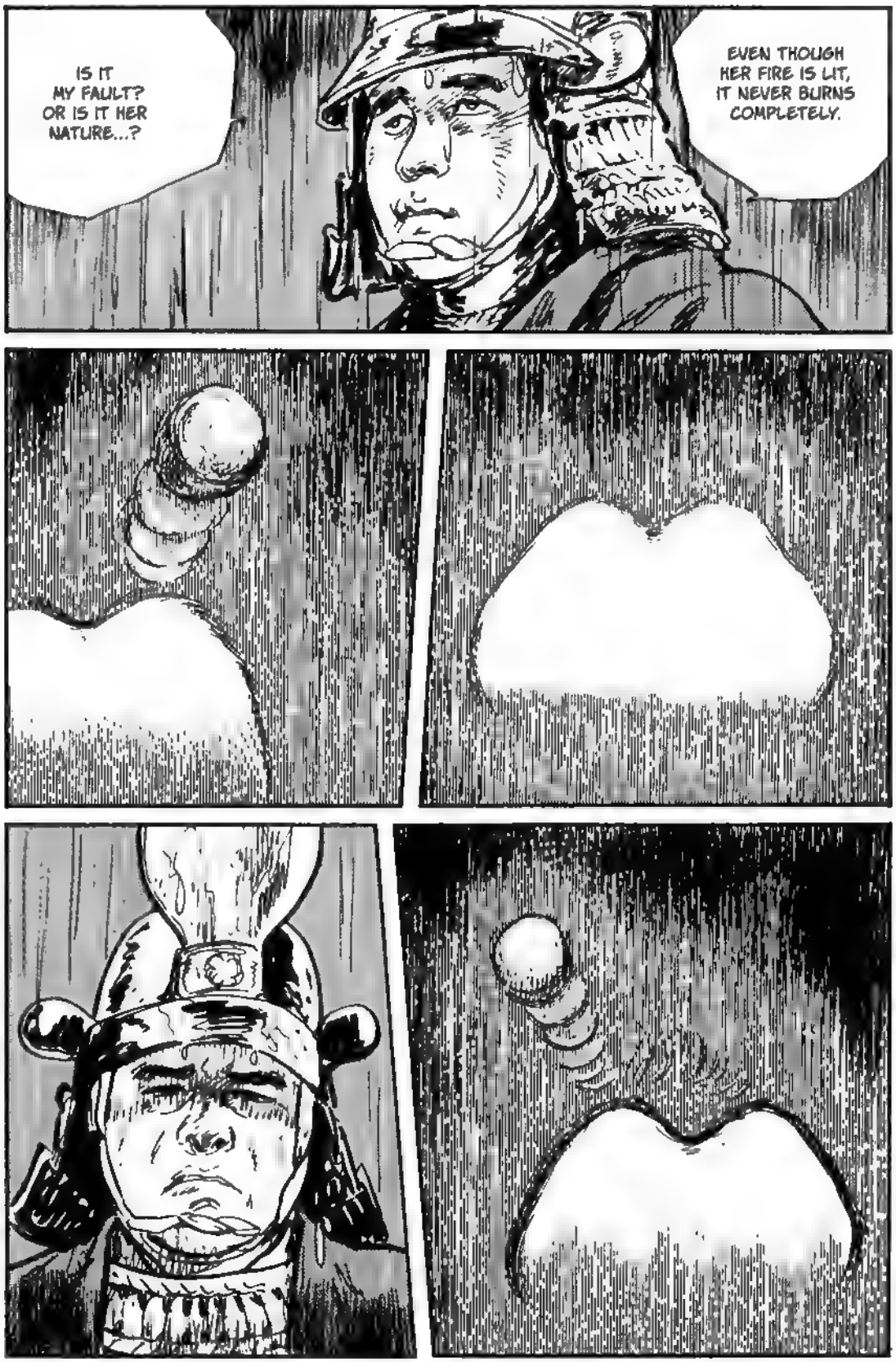
TUP
TUP
TUP
TUP

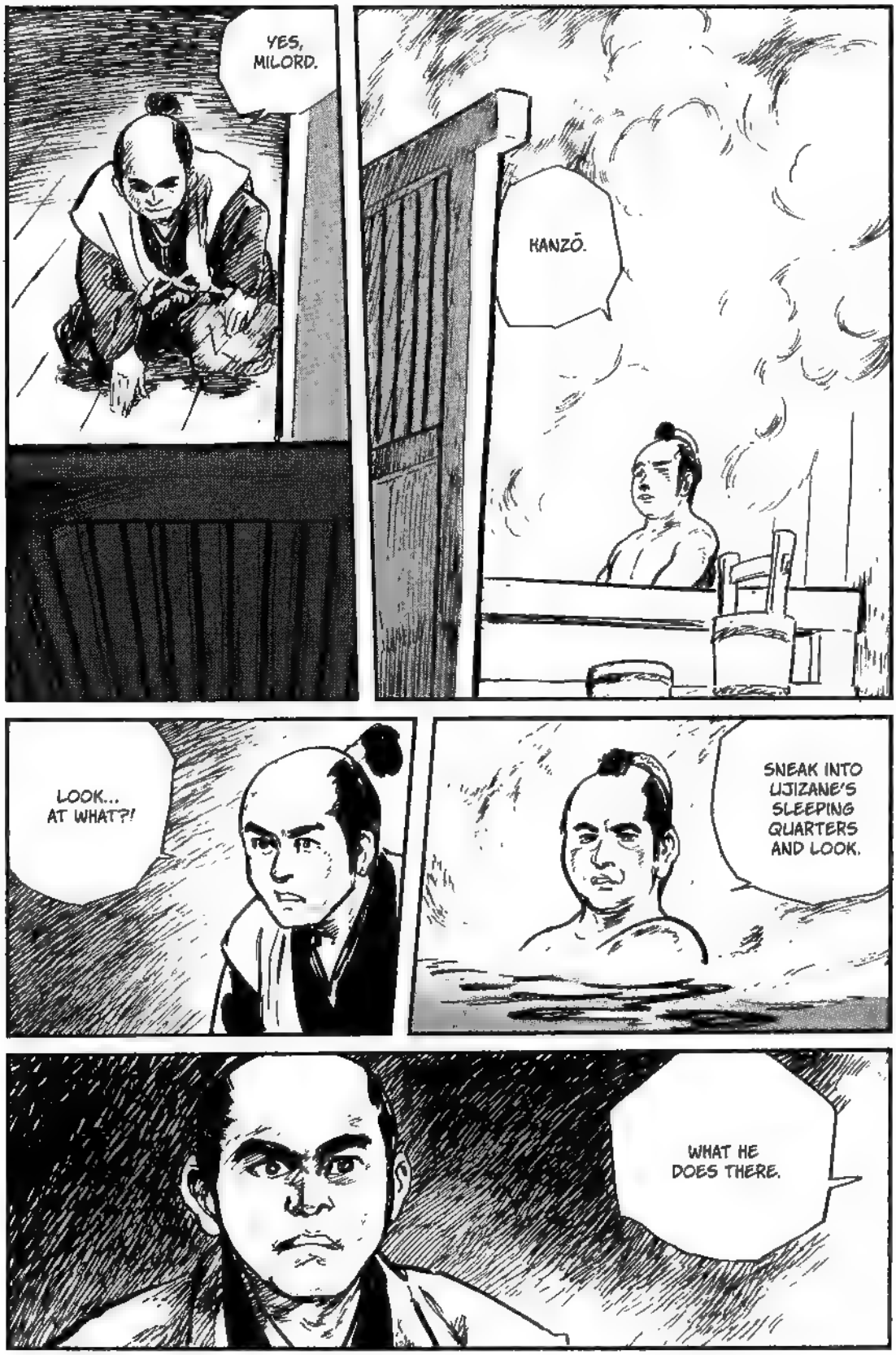

TUP
TUP
TUP
TUP
TUP

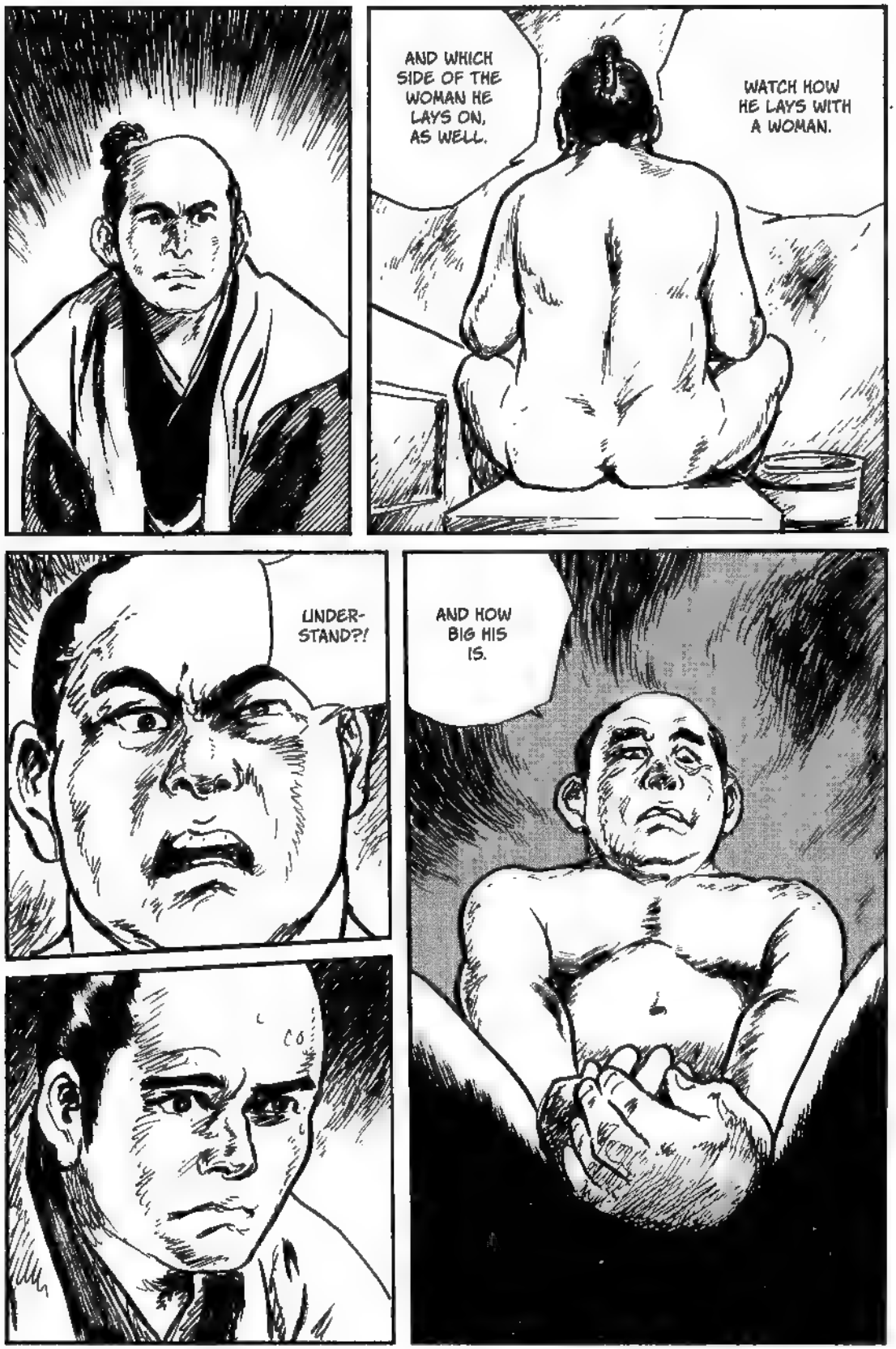
ZAHA

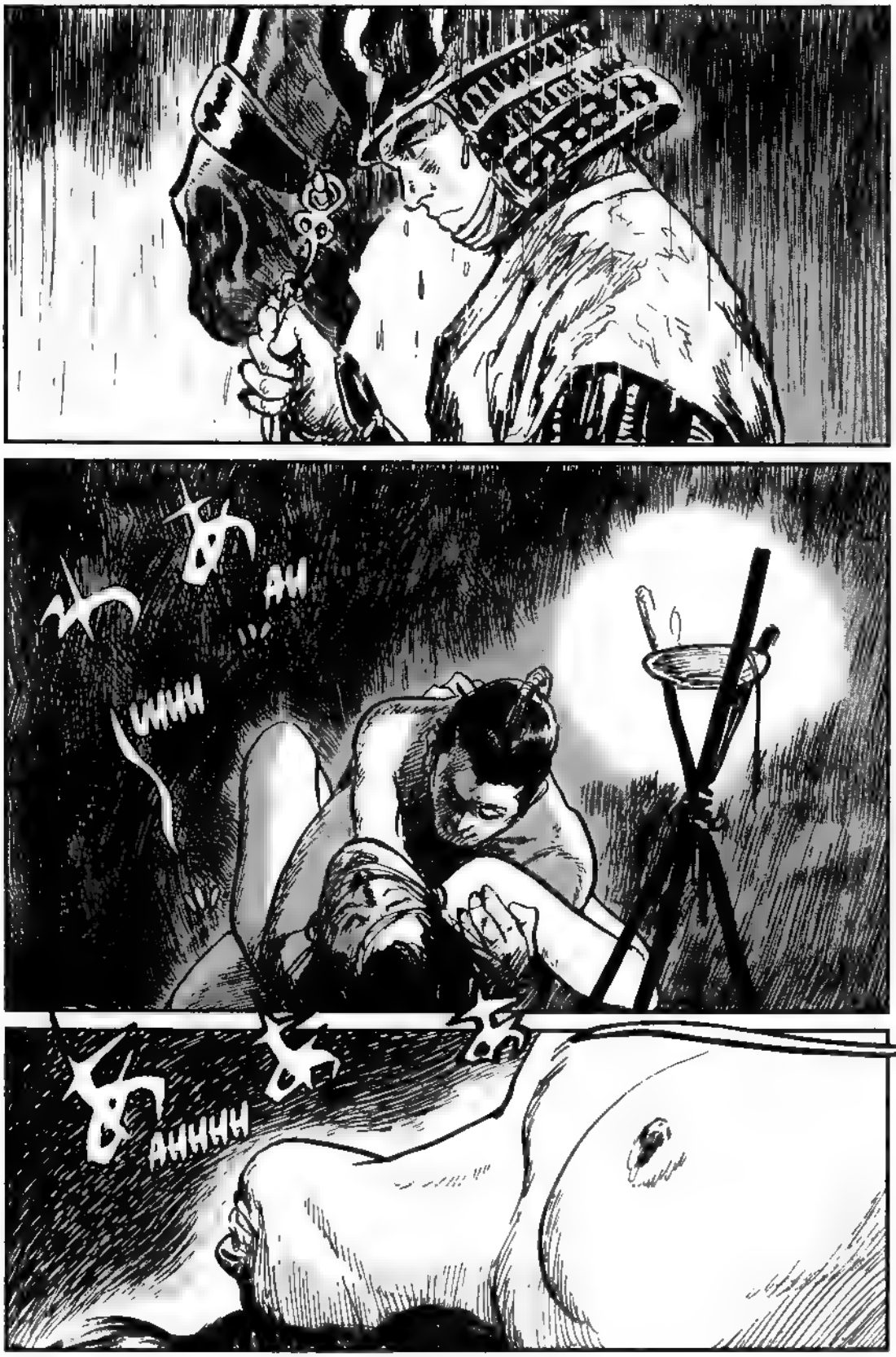
MORE...
OHH...
MORE...

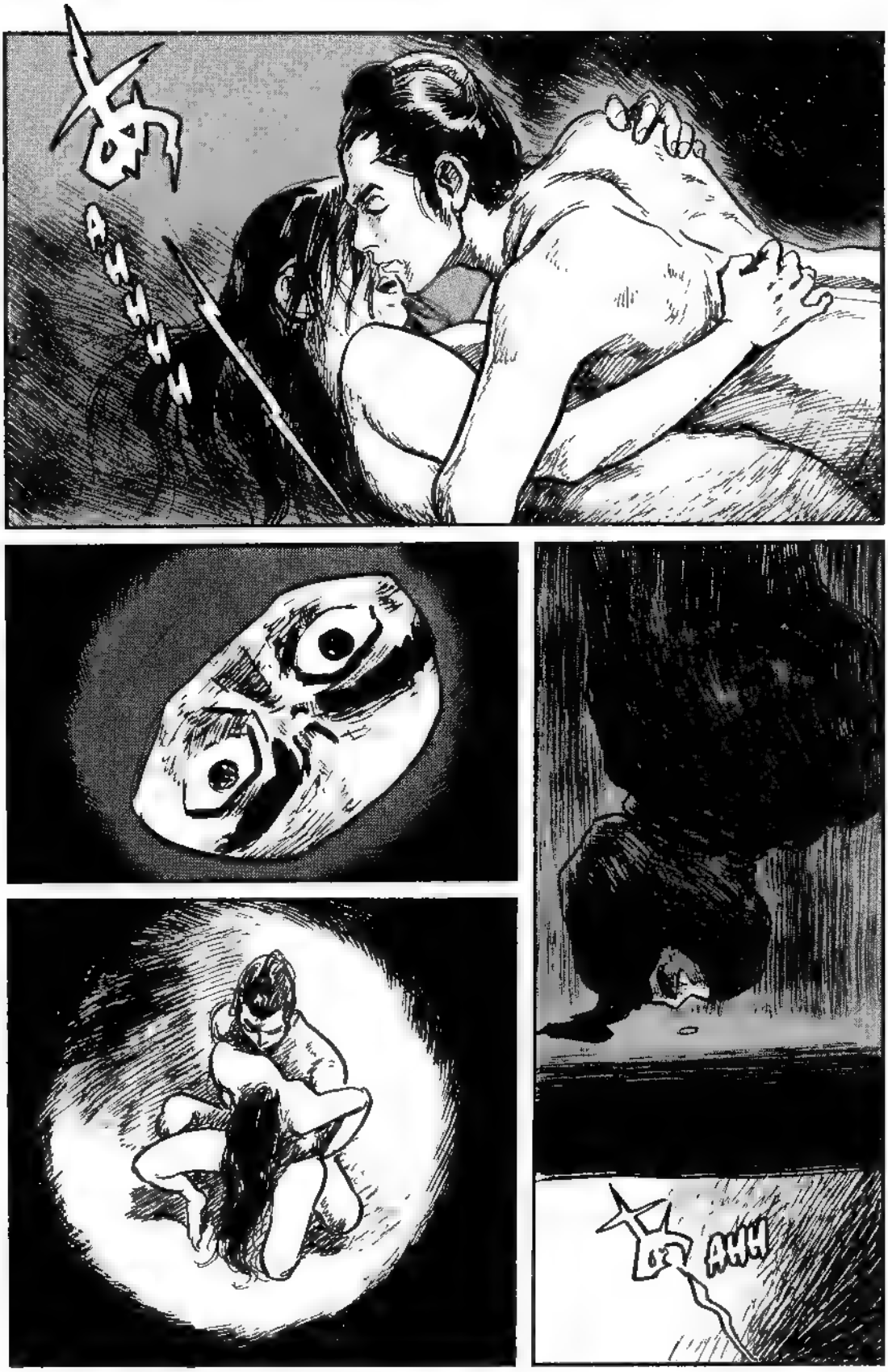
...DOES SHE NEVER CLIMAX...?
WHY...

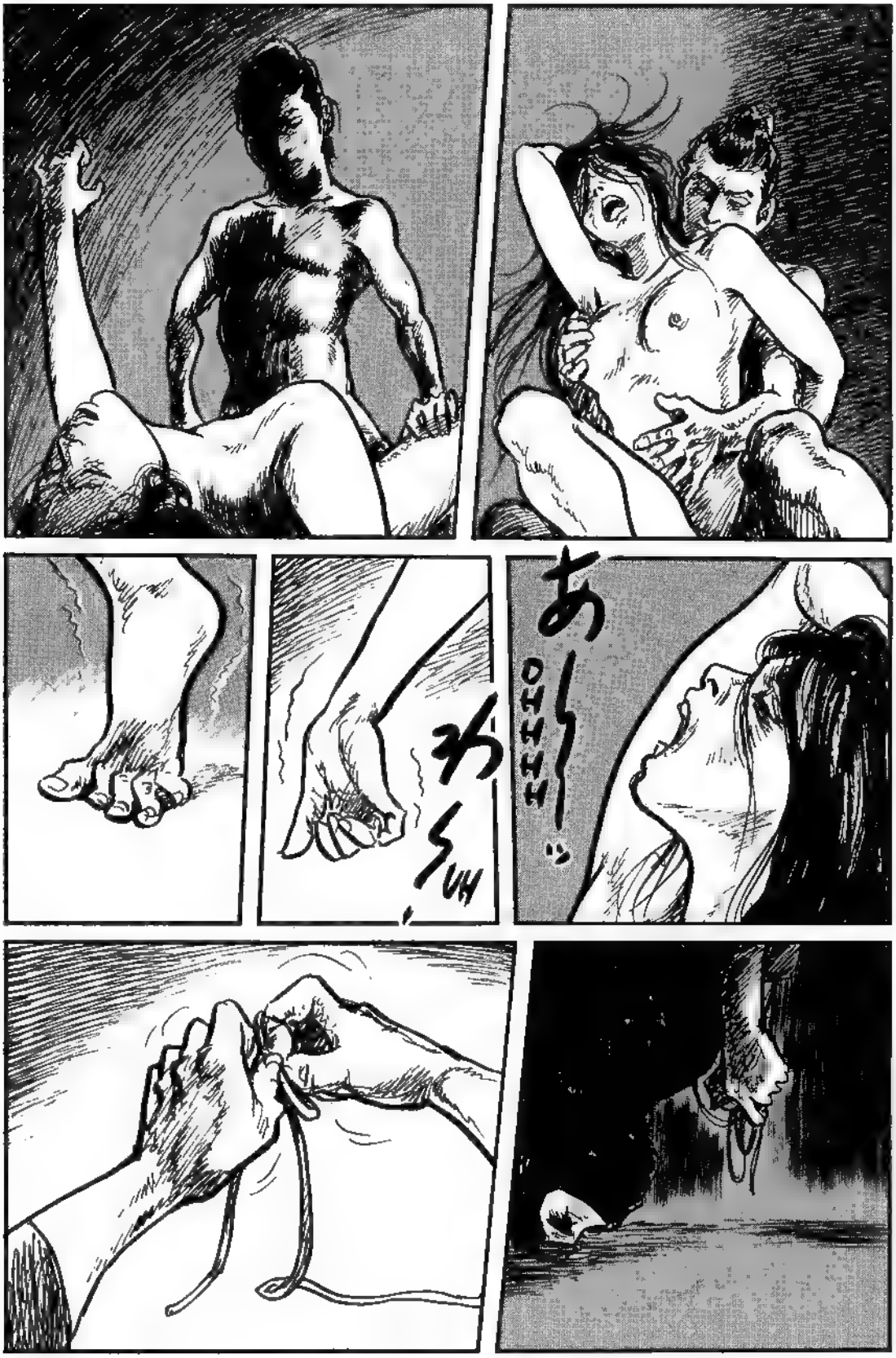

IS IT MY FAULT? OR IS IT HER NATURE...?
EVEN THOUGH HER FIRE IS LIT, IT NEVER BURNS COMPLETELY.


YES, MILORD.
KANZŌ.
LOOK... AT WHAT?!
SNEAK INTO UJIZANE'S SLEEPING QUARTERS AND LOOK.
WHAT HE DOES THERE.


AND WHICH SIDE OF THE WOMAN HE LAYS ON, AS WELL.
WATCH HOW HE LAYS WITH A WOMAN.
UNDER-STAND?!
AND HOW BIG HIS IS.


AH
!!!
MMM
AHHHH


AHHHH
AHH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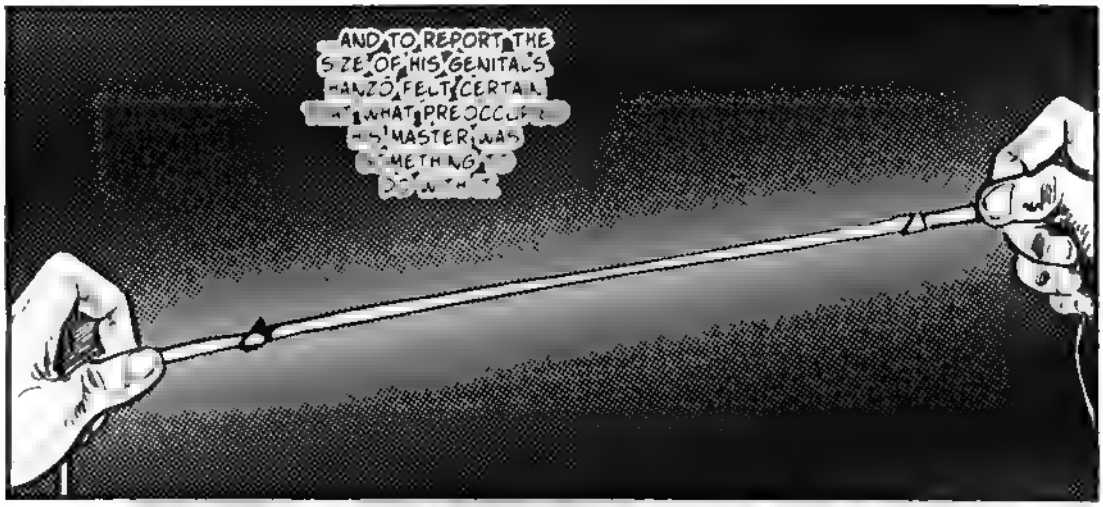
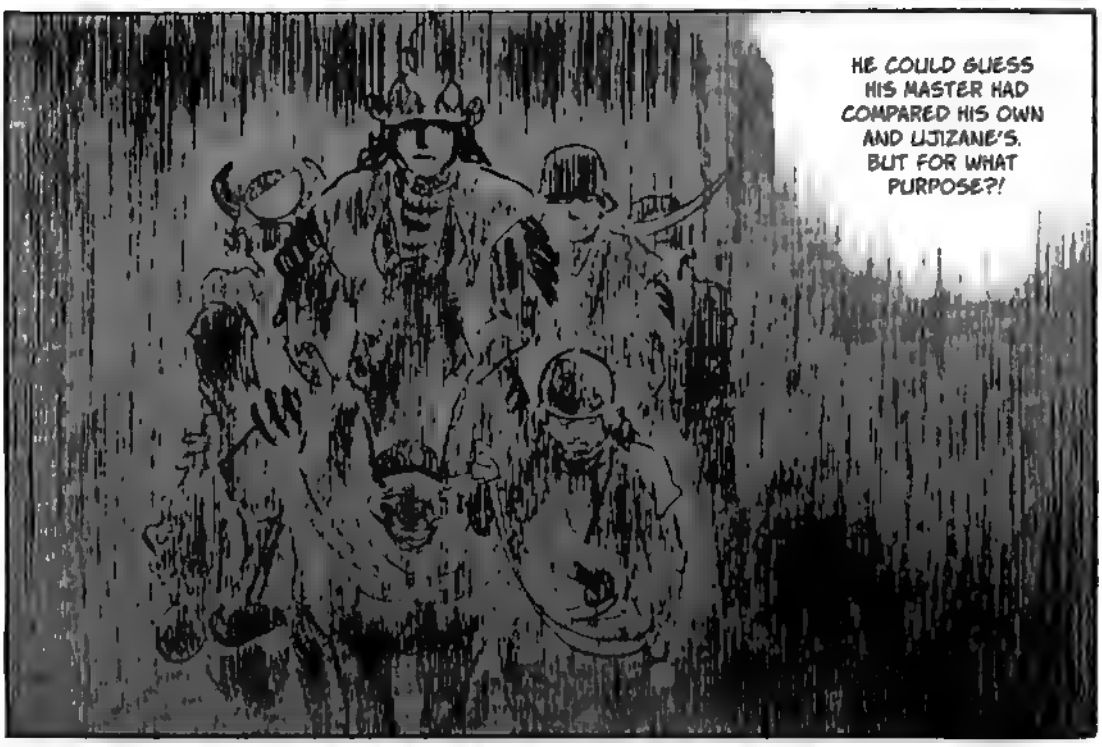
OHHHH!
ふ
UH

AS LONG AS A HORSE'S...
HMM. NOT THAT IMPRESSIVE...

CAN IT BE... ABOUT THAT?
THIS IS HIS FIRST TIME GOING INTO BATTLE... I WONDER WHAT IN THE WORLD IS ON HIS MIND
HE WAS SENT TO UJIZANE'S SLEEPING QUARTERS TO WATCH UJIZANE HAVE SEX WITH A WOMAN

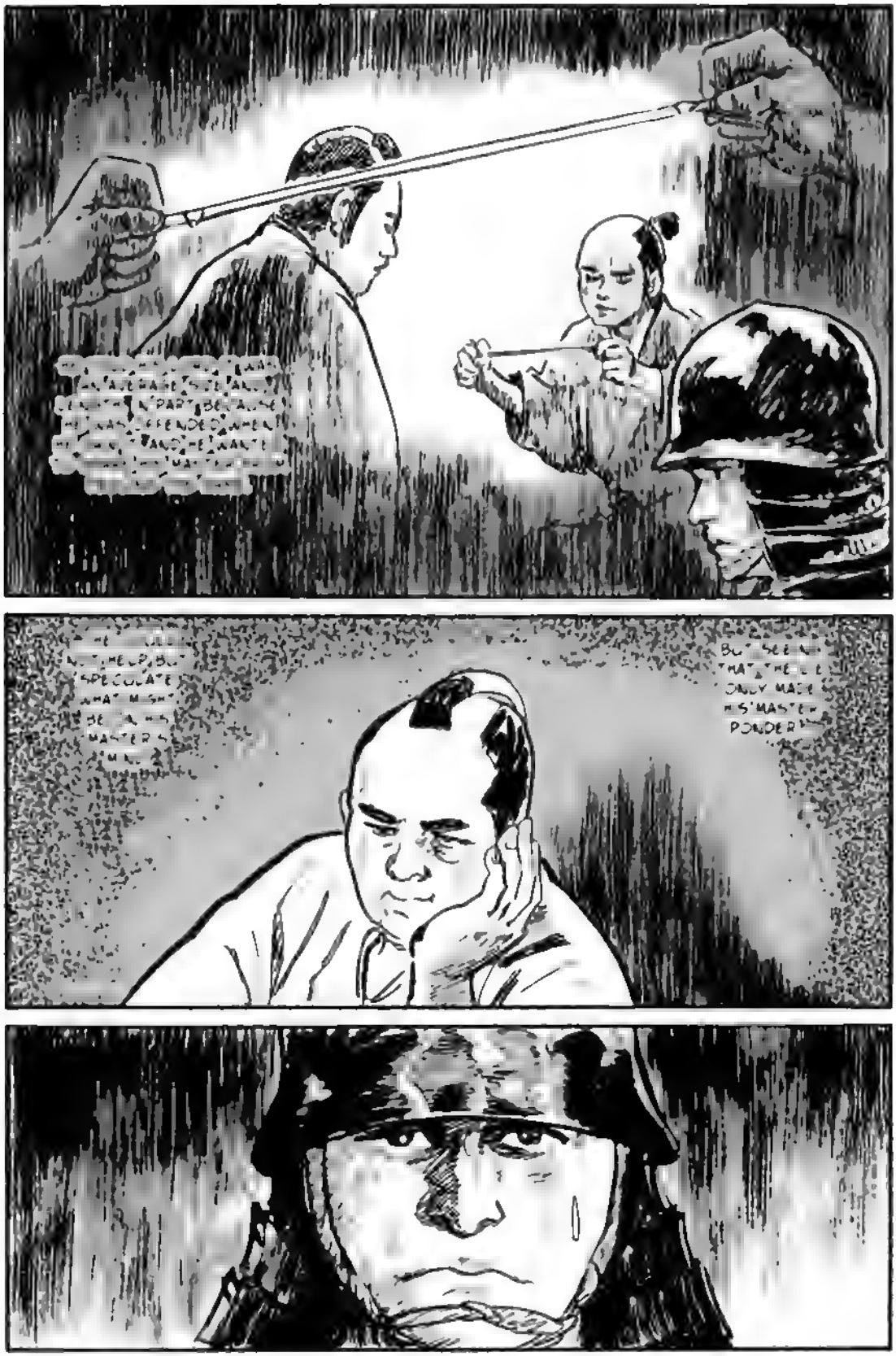

AND TO REPORT THE SIZE OF HIS GENITALS HANZO FELT CERTAIN WHAT PREOCCUPIED HIS MASTER WAS SOMETHING


HE COULD GUESS HIS MASTER HAD COMPARED HIS OWN AND UJIZANE'S. BUT FOR WHAT PURPOSE?!

HANZO COULD NOT CONJECTURE BEYOND IT

UJIZANE'S SHAFT WAS GIGANTIC COMPARED WITH HIS OWN. IT WAS EASILY TWO INCHES LONGER AND MUCH THICKER AS WELL.

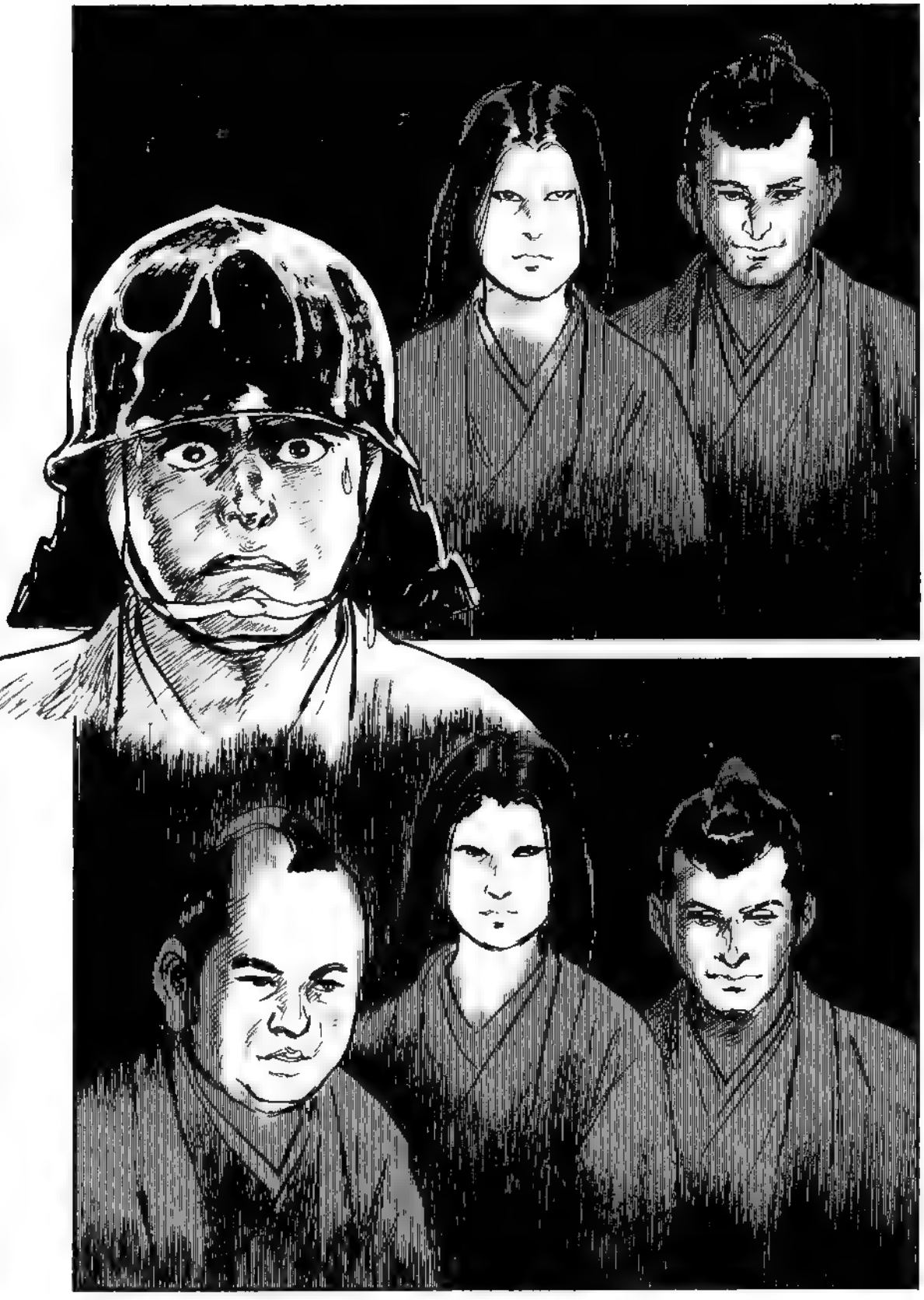
HANZO HAD TO ANALYZE WHY HE HAD NOT BEEN HONEST IN COMMUNICATING THAT FACT



SHE HOWLED HER SCREAM OF PLEASURE

THAT MUST BE WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BURN IN AN INFERNO OF SEX, THOUGHT HANZO.

AND IF A WOMAN WHO HAD SLEPT WITH A MAN LIKE UJIZANE MARRIED ANOTHER MAN...



OF COURSE IT HAD TO SLEET ON THE DAY OF MY FIRST CAMPAIGN.
Y... YES.
IT'S COLD, ISN'T IT.

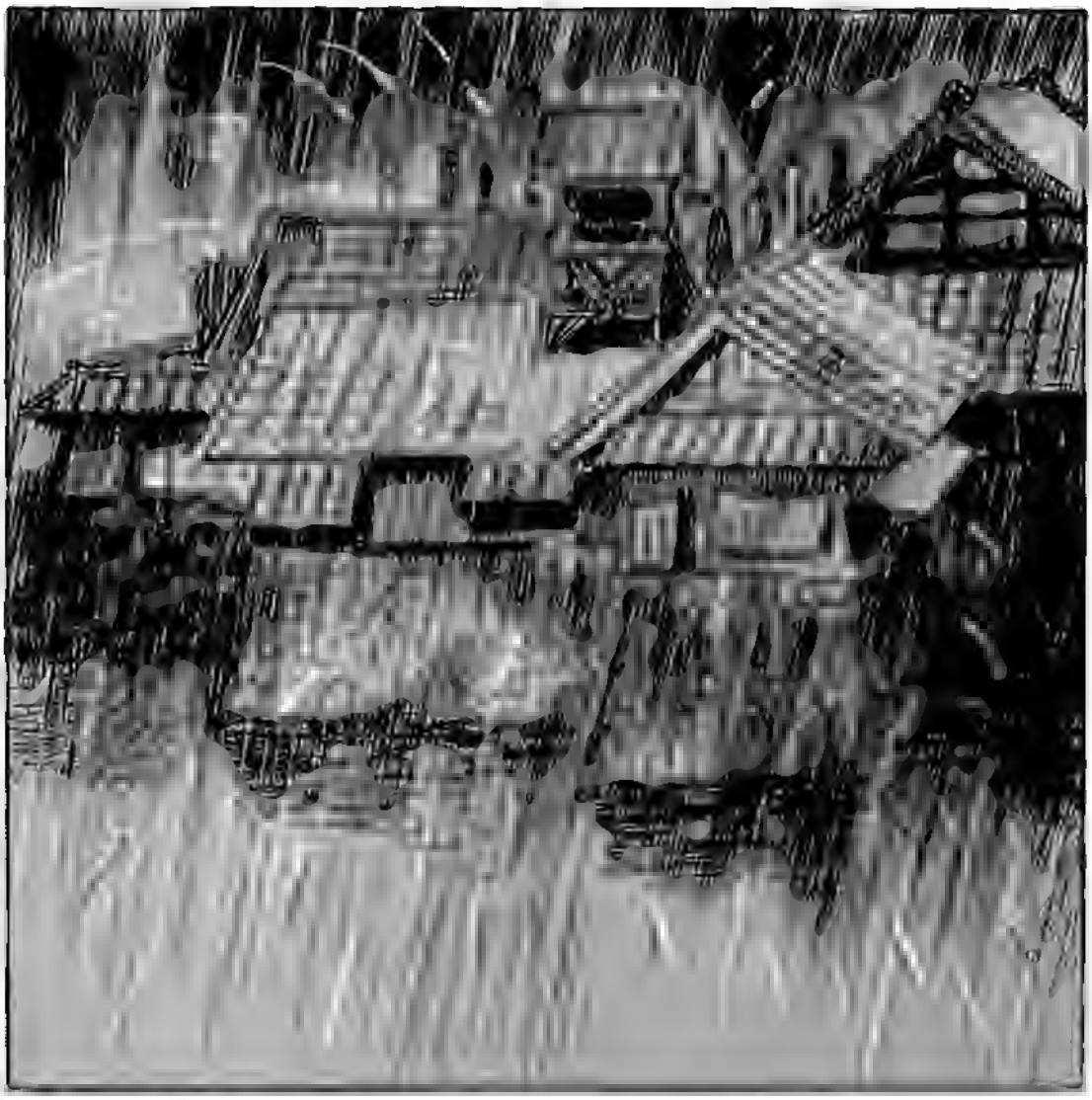
...
...
MAYBE IT'S HINTING AT MY LIFE TO COME.
IT RAINS AT HOME.
IT'S BEEN RAINING, AND IT WILL CONTINUE TO RAIN.
WHEN WILL IT EVER BE SUNNY?
AND IT RAINS ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

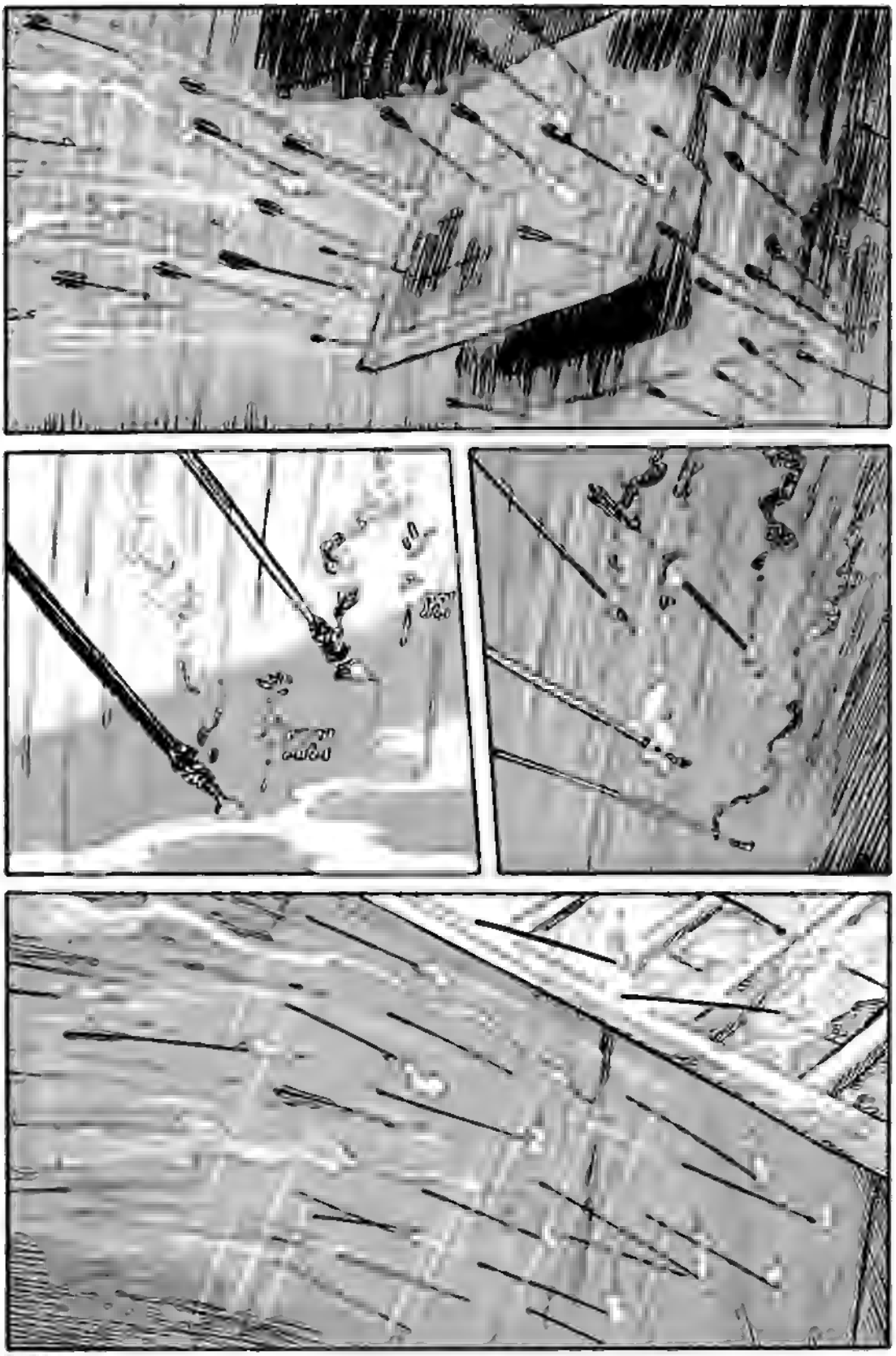
GET INSIDE THE CASTLE AND START A FIRE.
KANZŌ!!
MILORD
YES I'LL USE OIL.
CAN YOU DO IT?

WHAT?!
WE'LL ASSAULT THEM WITH FIRE FROM OUTSIDE, TOO.
NO ONE WOULD DREAM OF A FIRE ATTACK IN THE RAIN
THEY WON'T NOTICE THE REAL FIRE SPREADING SLOWLY FROM WITHIN.
I BET TERABE'S SOLDIERS WILL JEER AND THINK I'M A FOOL. AND THAT MEANS THEY'LL BE DISTRACTED.

GET THE OIL AND ARROWS READY!!
WE'LL LAUNCH A FIRE ATTACK!!

MOVE!!
HE'S VANISHED ALREADY





HA HA HA HA HA HA.
GWA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
SHOOTING FIRE IN THE RAIN. WHAT AN IDIOT! HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA

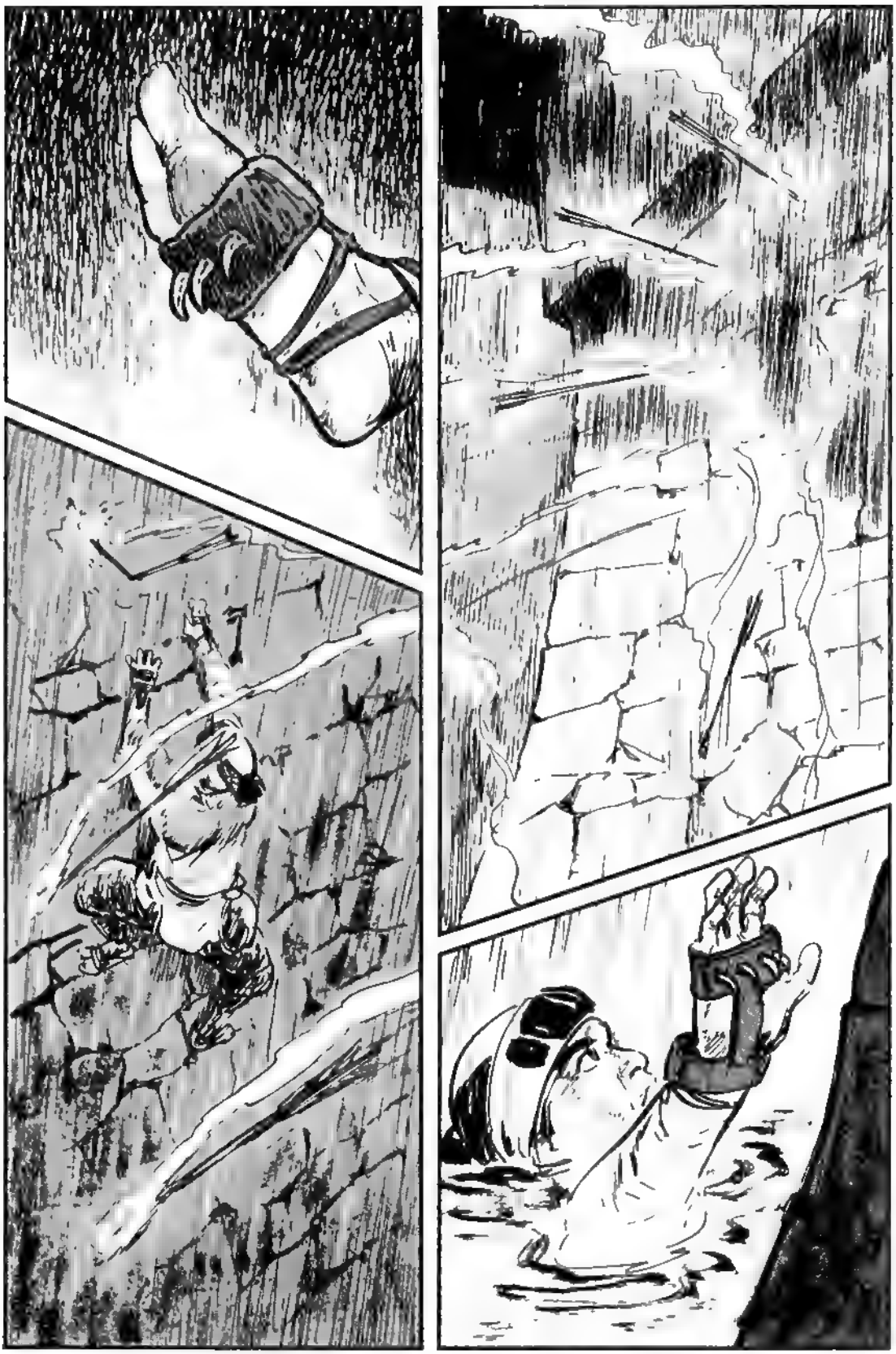
OF COURSE NOT. HE'S USING THE FIRE ARROWS TO LURE US OUT.
EVEN A HALFWIT WOULDN'T WASTE TIME THAT WAY.
HE MUST HAVE SOMETHING UP HIS SLEEVE, MILORD.

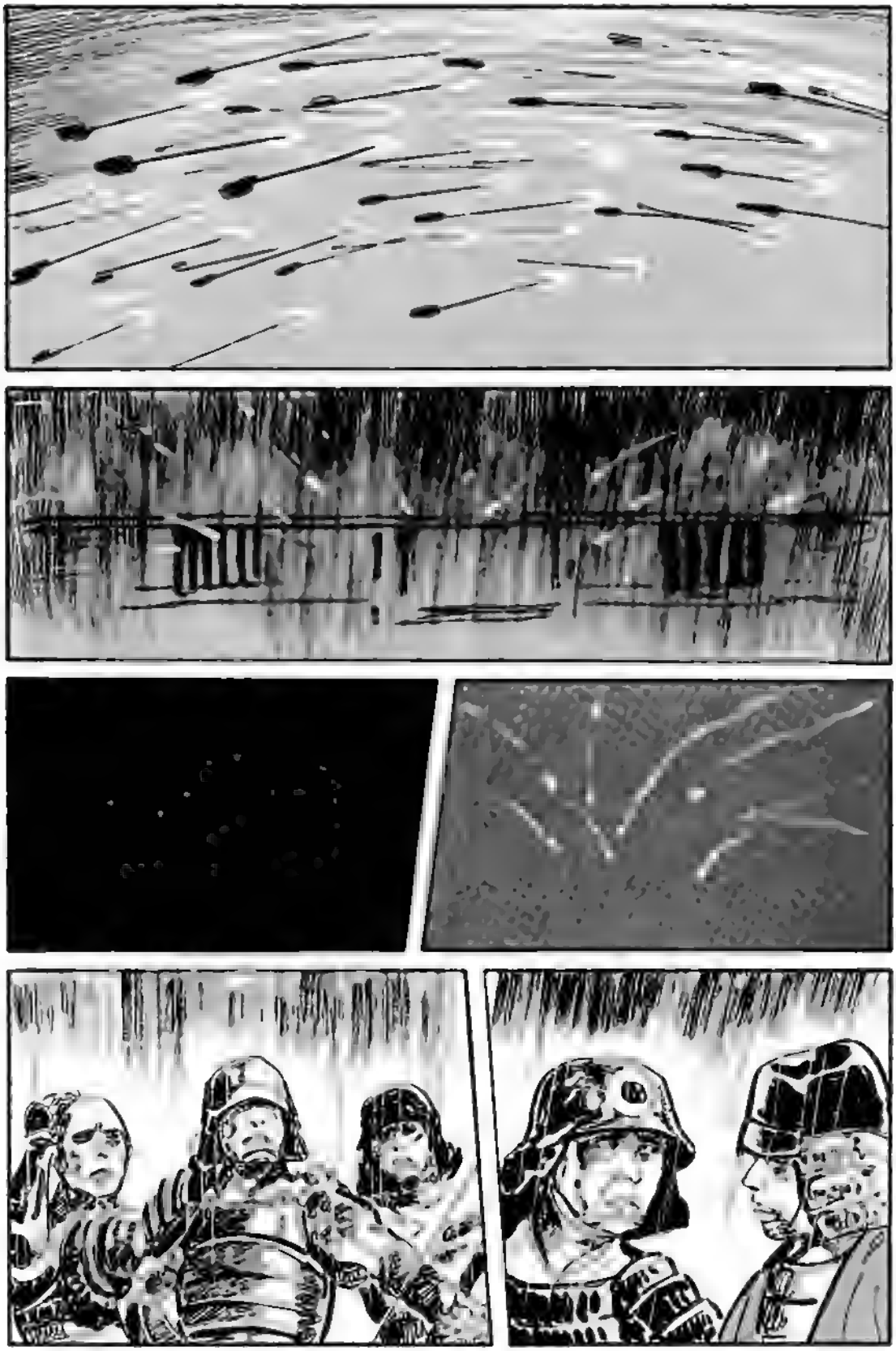
THE YOUNGSTER'S MESSAGE DEMANDS THAT WE SETTLE THE BATTLE IN THE FIELD.
HE'S TELLING US TO COME OUT OF THE CASTLE AND FIGHT.
LURE US OUT?

NO BIRDS FLY, AND GOOD ARROWS STORED. CRAFTY RABBITS GONE, AND HUNTING DOGS COOKED.
YOU KNOW THE OLD SAYING.

HMM, I SEE...
IF WE DON'T COME OUT TO FIGHT, OUR ARROWS AND SWORDS ARE OF NO USE, AND WE'LL EVENTUALLY BE COOKED UP
RIGHT. USING THE PROVERB, HE'S CHALLENGING US.
I BELIEVE THAT... WHEN THERE ARE NO MORE BIRDS, GOOD ARROWS WILL BE STORED AWAY, AND WHEN RABBITS ARE DEAD, HUNTING DOGS AREN'T NEEDED AND THEREFORE THEY'LL BE COOKED TO BE EATEN. THAT'S WHAT IT MEANS.
HE DOESN'T KNOW THE UGLINESS OR THE REAL STRATEGIES OF KILLING.
HE DREAMS IN THE BATTLEFIELD AND LONGS TO FIGHT. WHAT A MORON, INDEED.
GWA HA HA HA HA HA.
FROM WHAT I HEAR, THIS IS MOTONOBU'S FIRST BATTLE. IT'S EXACTLY WHAT A KID STILL TRYING TO GROW HIS FIRST HAIR WOULD THINK OF
JUST WATCH. THEY'LL BE BEATEN BY THE COLD ITSELF IN LESS THAN HALF A DAY.
WHAT FOOL WILL GO OUT IN THE SLEET AND FIGHT IN THE MUD? IT ONLY EXHAUSTS RESOURCES.

SSPSSH





KEEP SHOOTING THE FIRE ARROWS!
GO ON! YOU MUST NOT STOP!!

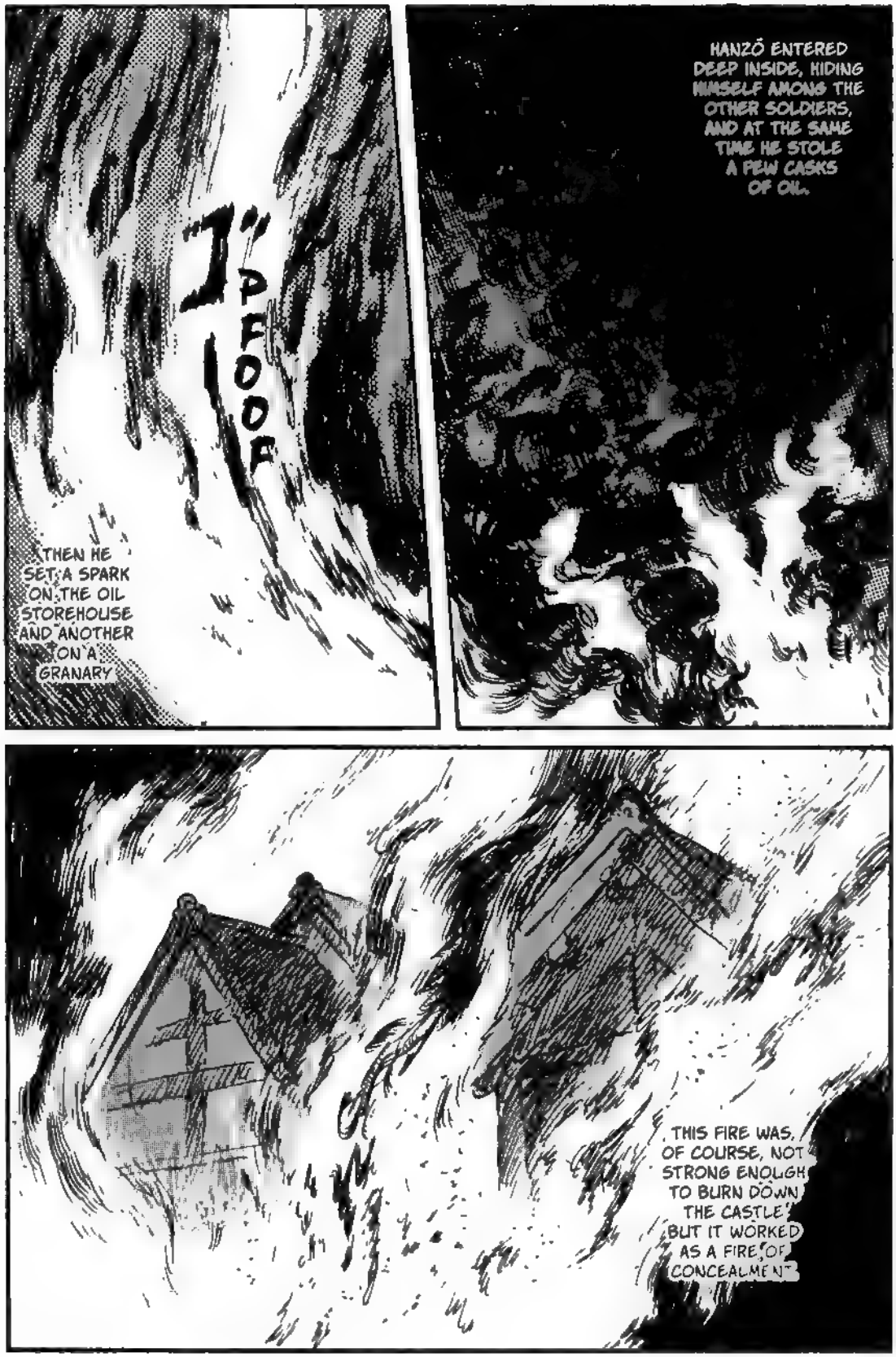
DO YOU INTEND TO DISOBEY YOUR MASTER?!
ALL OF YOU!!
M... MILORD! IT IS USELESS NO MATTER HOW MANY WE SHOOT IN THIS RAIN.
HA HA HA HA HA HA. THEY MUST BE THINKING HOW STUPID I AM.
I WONDER WHAT THEY'RE THINKING INSIDE THE CASTLE.
HA HA HA HA

BUT SHIGENORI ISN'T THE SORT OF MAN WHO'D RESPOND TO YOUR INTENT.
IT'S NOT THAT WE DON'T UNDERSTAND YOUR THOUGHTS, MILORD. GOOD ARROWS ARE STORED WHEN NO BIRDS FLY AND HUNTING DOGS ARE COOKED WHEN CRAFTY RABBITS ARE GONE. USING THE OLD SAYING, THE FIRE ARROWS ARE MEANT TO LURE THE ENEMY OUT...
HA HA HA HA HA.
AND YOU ARE, TOO.
...
...
IF I ORDER YOU TO CRUSH A BOULDER WITH YOUR FIST, WHAT WILL YOU DO?
SIR.
KAZUMASA.
WILL YOU JEER AT YOUR MASTER SAYING IT'S IMPOSSIBLE?

WHICH IS IT?
OR WILL YOU STRIKE THE ROCK KNOWING IT MAY BREAK YOUR FIST?
BE IT FIRE OR WATER, I CAN SEE YOU'RE THE TYPE OF MEN WHO'LL THINK FIRST BEFORE JUMPING IN FOR YOUR MASTER, AND WILL DO SO ONLY WHEN YOU'RE SATISFIED WITH THE CONCLUSION YOU REACH.
DETERMINATION CAN BREAK EVEN A ROCK, AS THEY SAY. UNLESS YOU TRY, YOU'LL NEVER KNOW. ONE IN A MILLION CHANCES, A FIST MAY CRUSH A BOULDER, AND EVEN MORE SO WHEN IT'S YOUR MASTER WHO ORDERS IT.

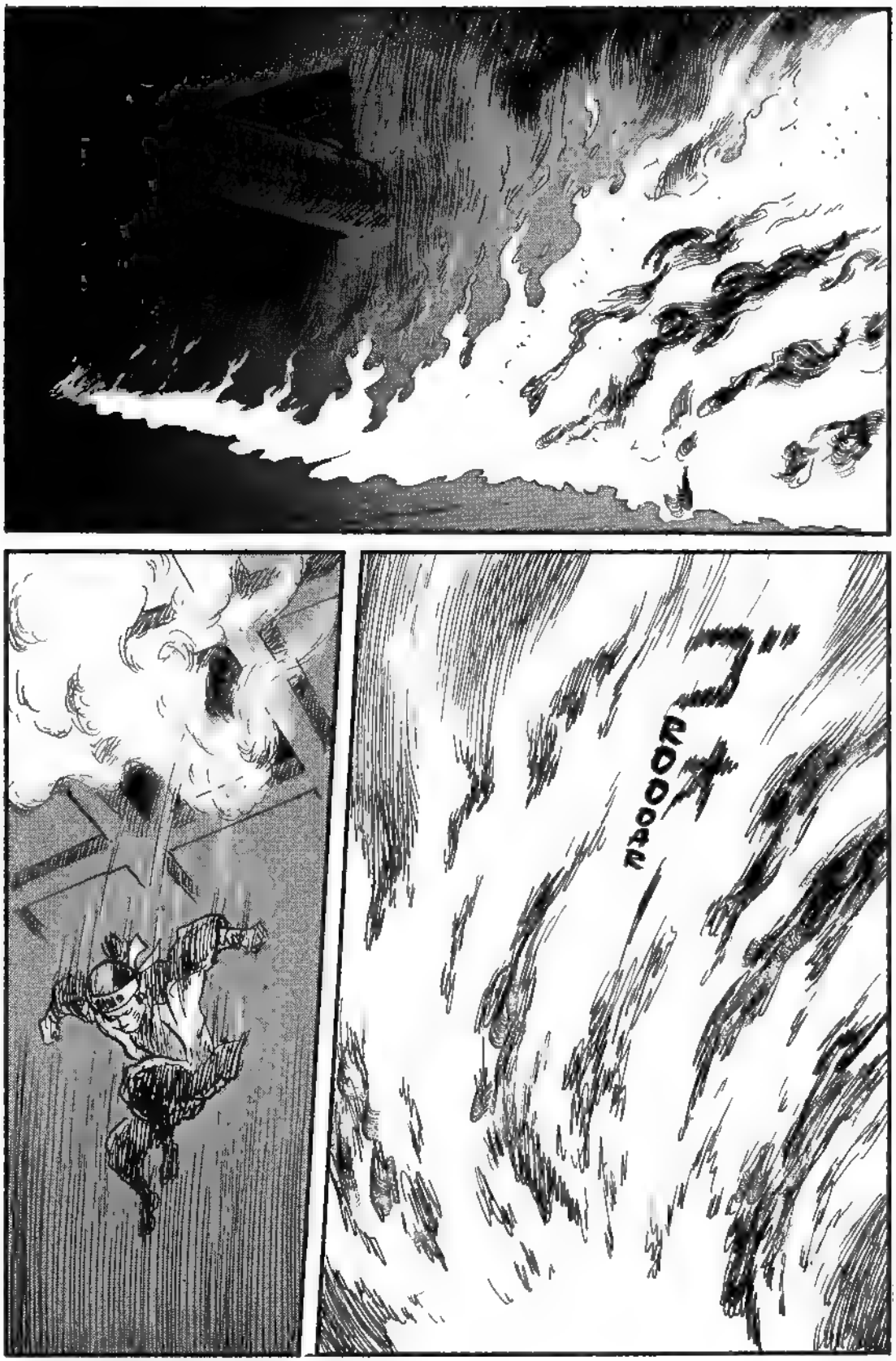
A MASTER RELIES ON HIS VASSALS AS HE WOULD HIS OWN RIGHT HAND, TO JUMP IN WITH ONLY AN INSTANT'S NOTICE, BE IT FIRE OR WATER. OTHERWISE, HOW CAN HE SURVIVE THESE WARRING YEARS?
LISTEN, ALL OF YOU.
THE FIRST WAS WHEN YOU TOLD ME TO JOIN FORCES WITH NOBUNAGA-*DONO*. NOW YOU TELL ME THAT A FIRE ATTACK IN THE RAIN IS A WASTE.
THIS IS THE SECOND TIME.
I CAN FORGIVE MY ENEMY SCOFFING AT ME... BUT IT HURTS TO HAVE MY OWN PEOPLE DOUBT ME AND BE AFRAID OVER NOTHING.
WHAT DIFFICULT MEN YOU ARE.
BUT WHAT IF THE CASTLE BURSTS INTO FLAME?

THERE ARE TWO STEPS
STARTING A FIRE
AFTER SNEAKING
A CASTLE THE FIRST
S THE FIRE OF
CONCEALMENT
S A FIRE USED
TRACT GARR
THE SECOND IS THE FIRE
ROM ABOVE IT IS A FIRE
SED TO ENGULF THE
ASTLE THESE STEPS
ARE DESCRBED MAN


"I" POOF
THEN HE SET A SPARK ON THE OIL STOREHOUSE AND ANOTHER ON A GRANARY
HANZŌ ENTERED DEEP INSIDE, HIDING HIMSELF AMONG THE OTHER SOLDIERS, AND AT THE SAME TIME HE STOLE A FEW CASKS OF OIL.
THIS FIRE WAS, OF COURSE, NOT STRONG ENOUGH TO BURN DOWN THE CASTLE, BUT IT WORKED AS A FIRE OF CONCEALMENT

IT SENT THE ENEMY EVERY WHICH WAY IN A STATE OF CONFUSION.

USING THEIR ABSENCE,
HE WENT UP AND
SPRAYED OIL OVER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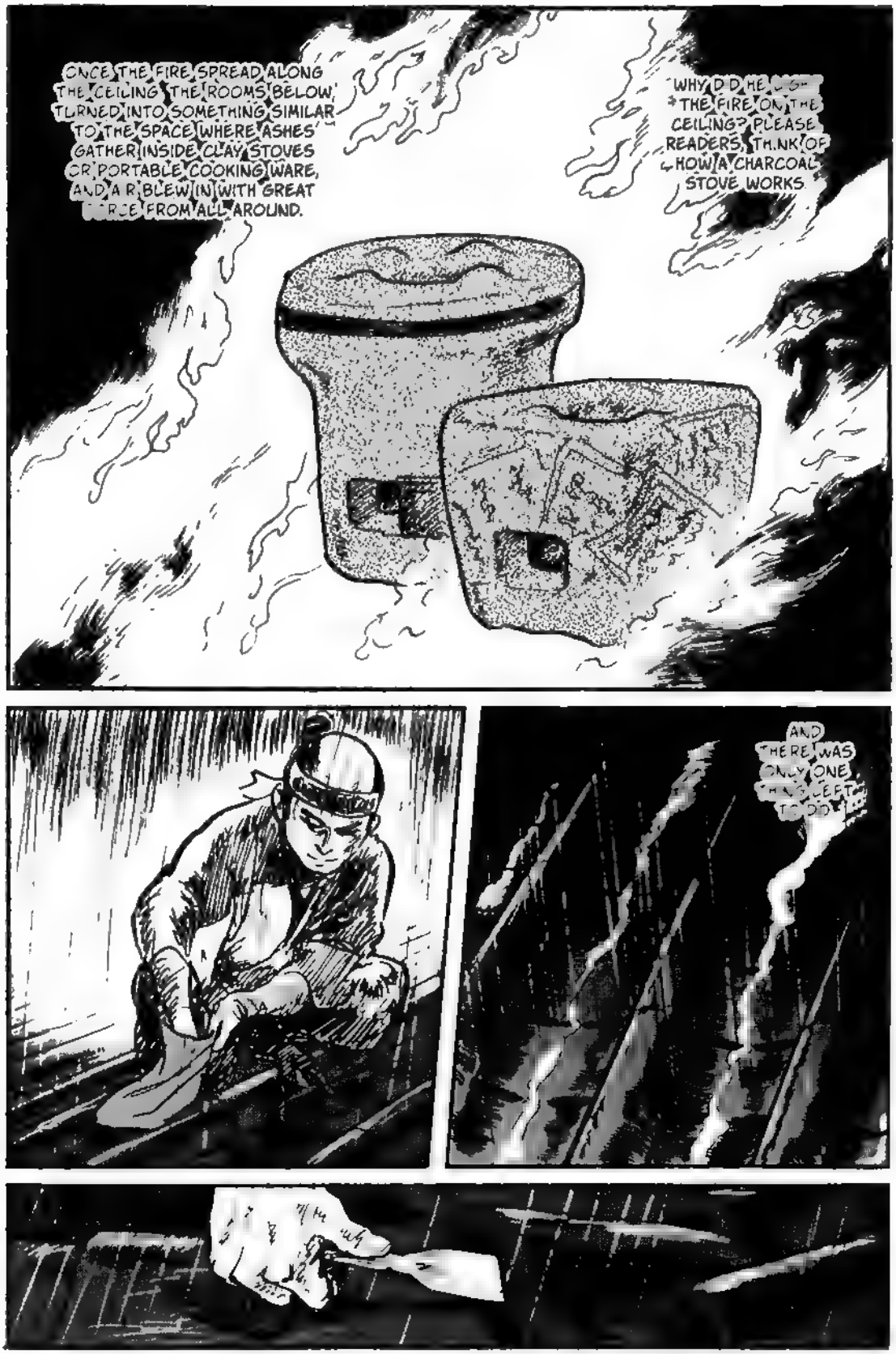
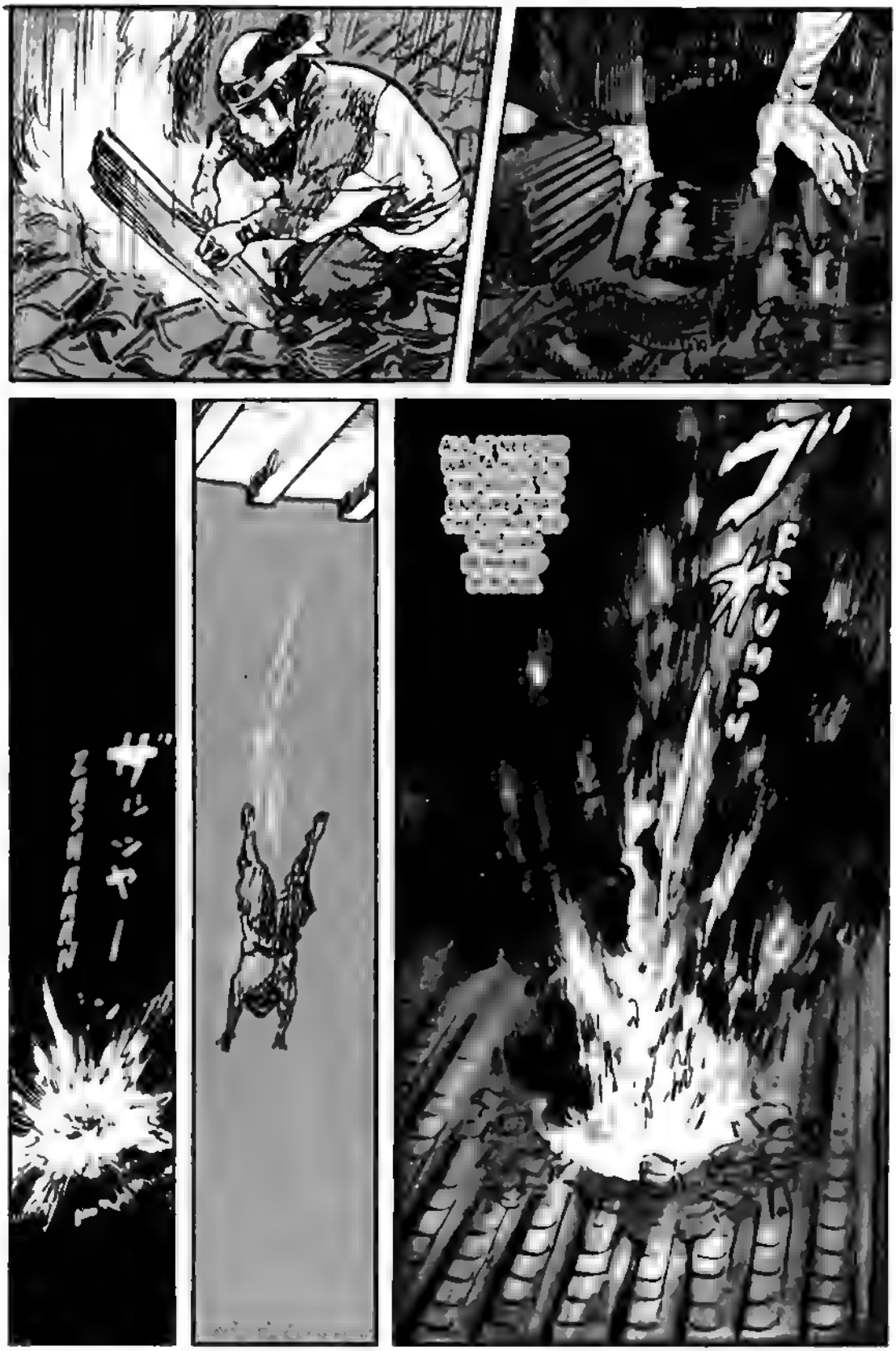

ONCE THE FIRE SPREAD ALONG THE CEILING THE ROOMS BELOW TURNED INTO SOMETHING SIMILAR TO THE SPACE WHERE ASHES GATHER INSIDE CLAY STOVES OR PORTABLE COOKING WARE, AND AIR BLEW IN WITH GREAT FORCE FROM ALL AROUND.
WHY DID HE USE THE FIRE ON THE CEILING? PLEASE READERS, THINK OF HOW A CHARCOAL STOVE WORKS
AND THERE WAS ONLY ONE THING LEFT TO DO!...


ヴ"
FRUNDA
ザッシャー

EVEN THOUGH IT HAD BEEN HIS DEA IEYASU COULD HARDL BELIEVE HIS EYES WHEN IACTUALL HAPPENED
HMM. MM.
LIR.

HMM.

BE PREPARED AND DO NOT LOWER YOUR GUARD
DRIVEN OUTSIDE, THE TERABE FORCES WILL BE DESPERATE
THEY'LL LAUNCH THEIR ATTACK!
WE HAVE TWICE THEIR POWER. FIGHT ONE WITH TWO AND SEND THEM TO THEIR GRAVES

THEY WOULD NOT HAVE DISOBEYED HIM IF ONLY HE'D TOLD THEM THAT HANZO WAS GOING TO START A FIRE FROM WITHIN, AND THAT THEY HAD TO CONTINUE SHOOTING THEIR ARROWS TO KEEP THE ENEMY DISTRACTED.
AND, AT THE SAME TIME, EYAS COULD NOT ERASE HIS GUILTY CONSCIENCE THAT HE WAS DECEIVING HIS VASSALS.

AND, YET IT MADE IEYASU SAD
BUT INSTEAD, HE WENT ABOUT EVERYTHING IN A CIRCUITOUS MANNER, SURPRISING HIS MEN AND FLAUNTING HIS POWER. BECAUSE HE AND HIS VASSALS DID NOT GET ALONG SO WELL, HE KNEW HE HAD TO TAKE THE TROUBLE TO USE SUCH TACTICS.

WAAAA
DO
DO
DO
DO
DO
DO
DO
DO
DO
DO
DO
DO

YOU, STRIPLING!!

AND THEN SUDDENLY FELT HIS GRIP STEEN
W... WE WON...

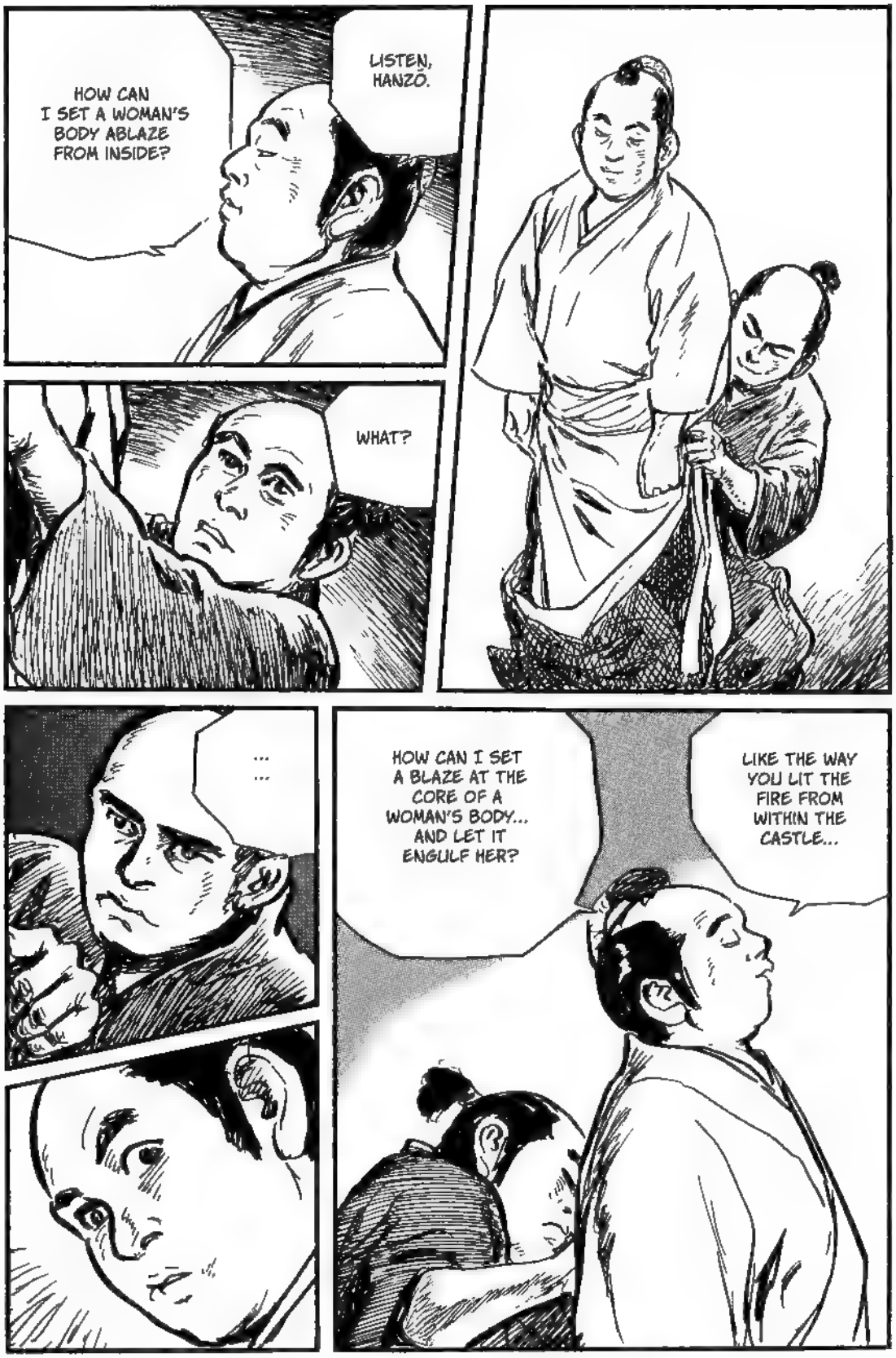
BUT IN FACT, YOU HIT THE NAIL RIGHT ON THE HEAD.
TO ATTACK WITH FIRE IN THE RAIN MAY APPEAR TO BE NOTHING BUT TAKING THE ENEMY BY SURPRISE WITH AN UNUSUAL PLOT.

IT DOESN'T MATTER WHETHER IT'S RAINY OR WINDY.
ATTACKING BY FIRE OR STARVING THE ENEMY OUT IS WHAT MILITARY SCIENCE CONSIDERS BETTER THAN CAPTURING A CASTLE BY FORCE.
GWA HA HA HA HA HA HA.
...AND UNLESS IT SPREADS, NOTHING CAN BE DONE ABOUT HER.
IT'S JUST LIKE MAKING A WOMAN GROAN. UNLESS A FIRE IS LIT INSIDE HER BODY...
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA

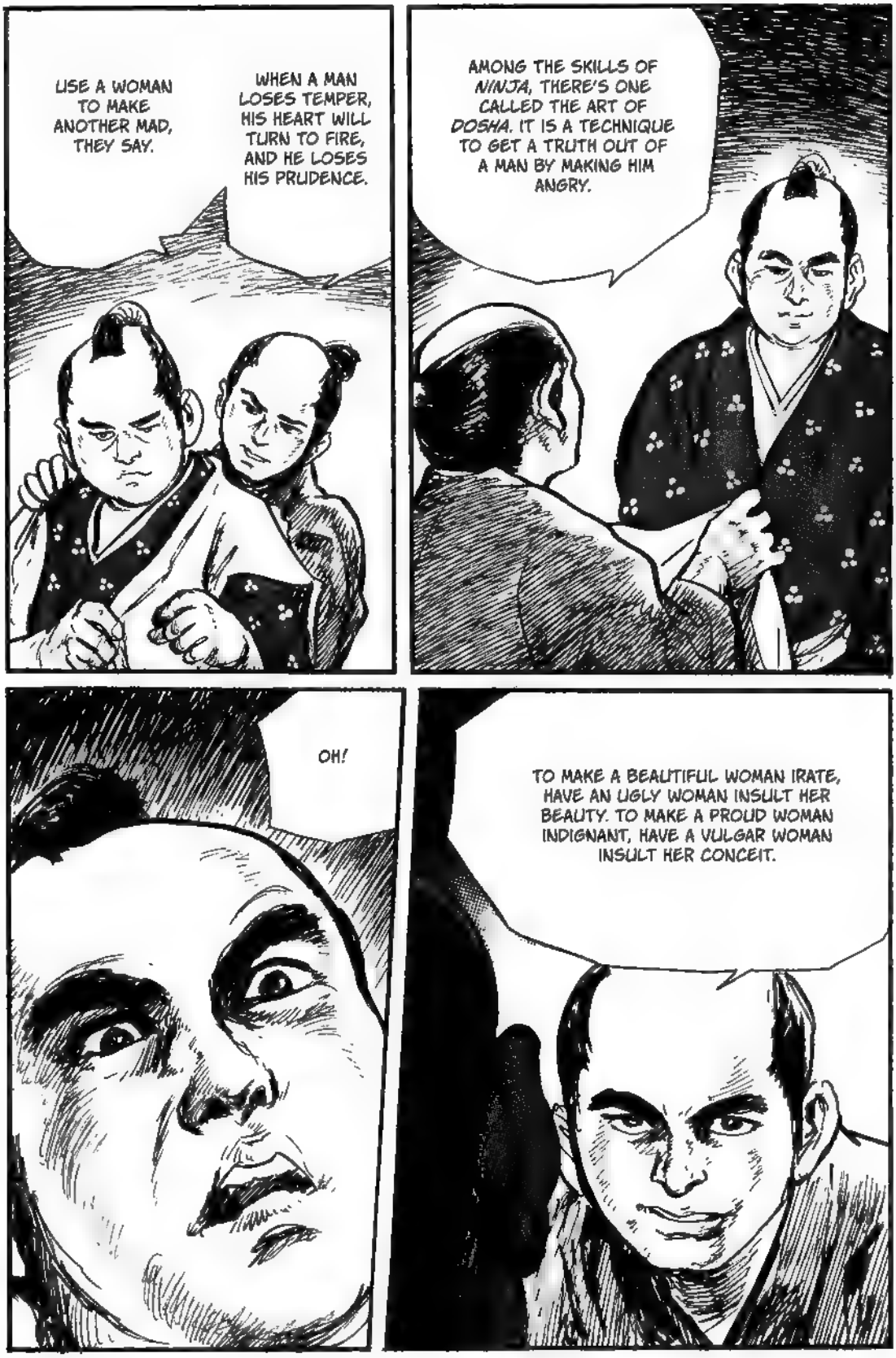
...AND UNLESS IT SPREADS...
UNLESS A FIRE IS LIT INSIDE HER BODY...
TO MAKE... A WOMAN GROAN...

HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
ABOUT YOUR REQUEST, I GRANT YOU THE PERMISSION TO CHANGE YOUR NAME.
TO SET HER BODY ABLAZE FROM THE CORE...
GWA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
HA
WELL DONE, MOTONOBU.

Y... YES.
MOTOYASU, WAS IT?
I... I AM GRATEFUL.
FINE. YOU MAY CALL YOURSELF SO.


HOW CAN I SET A WOMAN'S BODY ABLAZE FROM INSIDE?
LISTEN, HANZŌ.
WHAT?
...
...
HOW CAN I SET A BLAZE AT THE CORE OF A WOMAN'S BODY... AND LET IT ENGULF HER?
LIKE THE WAY YOU LIT THE FIRE FROM WITHIN THE CASTLE...

FORGET WHAT I ASKED.
HA HA HA HA HA.
HA HA HA HA HA. OF COURSE YOU WOULDN'T KNOW WHAT I AM TALKING ABOUT.
UM...
WHAT?
IT'S POSSIBLE TO ENRAGE HER.


USE A WOMAN TO MAKE ANOTHER MAD, THEY SAY.
WHEN A MAN LOSES TEMPER, HIS HEART WILL TURN TO FIRE, AND HE LOSES HIS PRUDENCE.
AMONG THE SKILLS OF *NINJA*, THERE'S ONE CALLED THE ART OF *DOSHA*. IT IS A TECHNIQUE TO GET A TRUTH OUT OF A MAN BY MAKING HIM ANGRY.
OH!
TO MAKE A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IRATE, HAVE AN UGLY WOMAN INSULT HER BEAUTY. TO MAKE A PROUD WOMAN INDIGNANT, HAVE A VULGAR WOMAN INSULT HER CONCEIT.

HMM...
MAKE HER FURIOUS... AND LIGHT A FIRE IN HER HEART...
I'M NOT SURE IF THIS ANSWERED YOUR QUESTION...

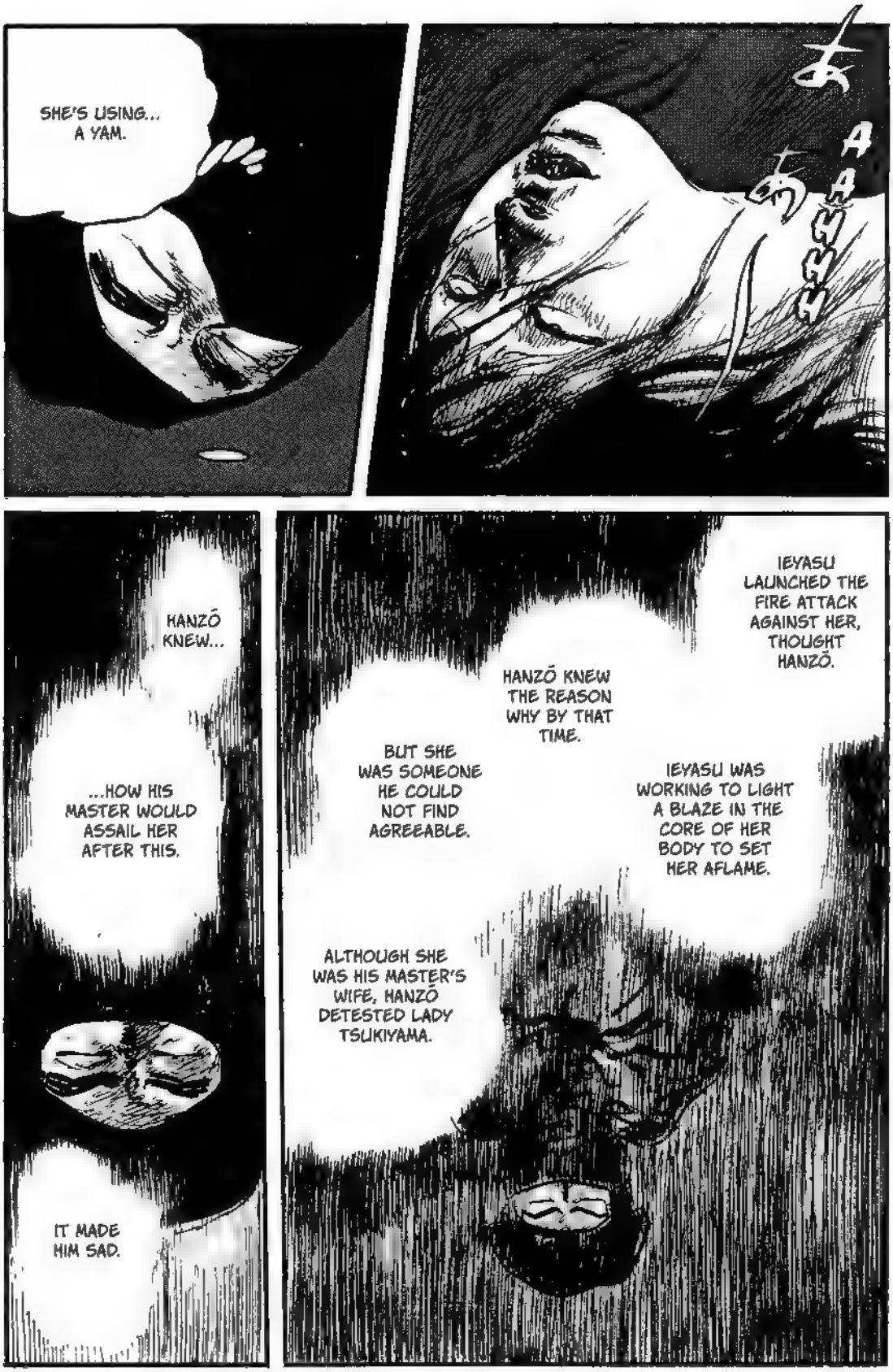
MMBL
MUMBLE
SNNORRE
SNNORRE

THIS IS THE FOURTH NIGHT.
MM MUMBLE
...
...
WHY?
WHAT'S GOING ON?

URM... UH...
HM..?!
MUMBLE MBL
I'M TIRED... SORRY...
MBL MBL

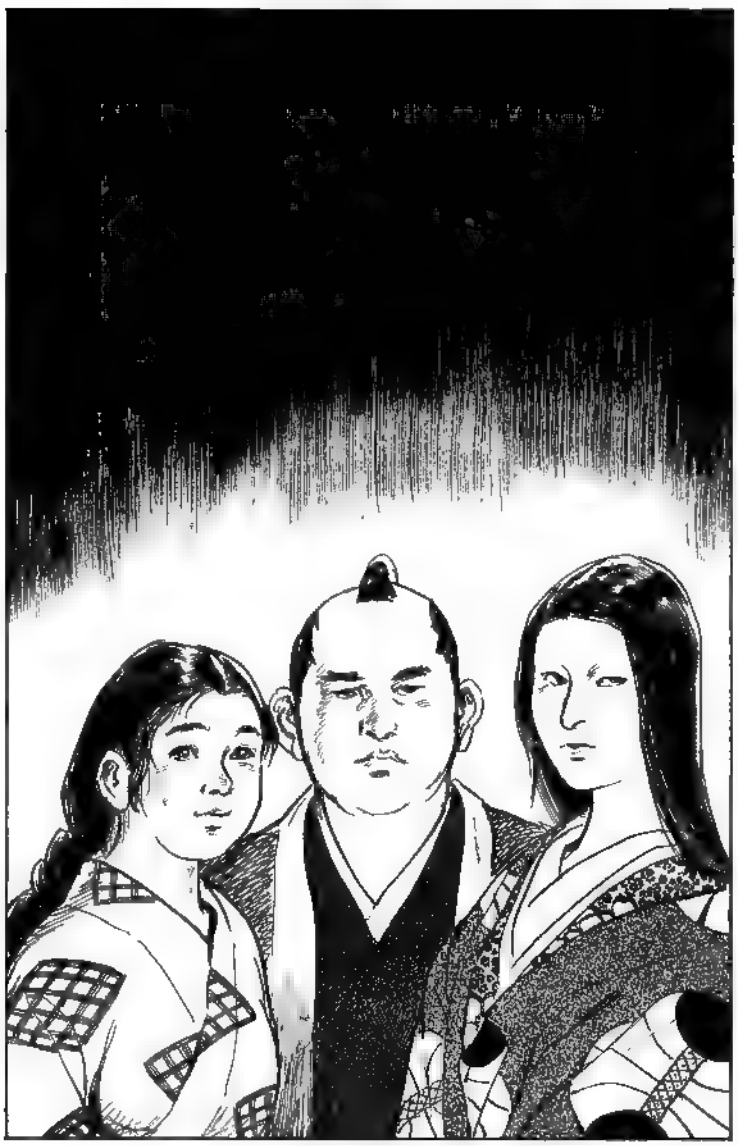
YES, MA'AM.
MASA-NARI.
IF HE DOES, I'M THINKING WE MUST PREPARE TO RECEIVE HER PROPERLY.
I'M NOT ASKING OUT OF JEALOUSY.
I DO NOT KNOW.
DOES MY LORD HAVE A WOMAN OTHER THAN MYSELF?
I DO NOT KNOW.
WHAT IF SHE GETS PREGNANT?

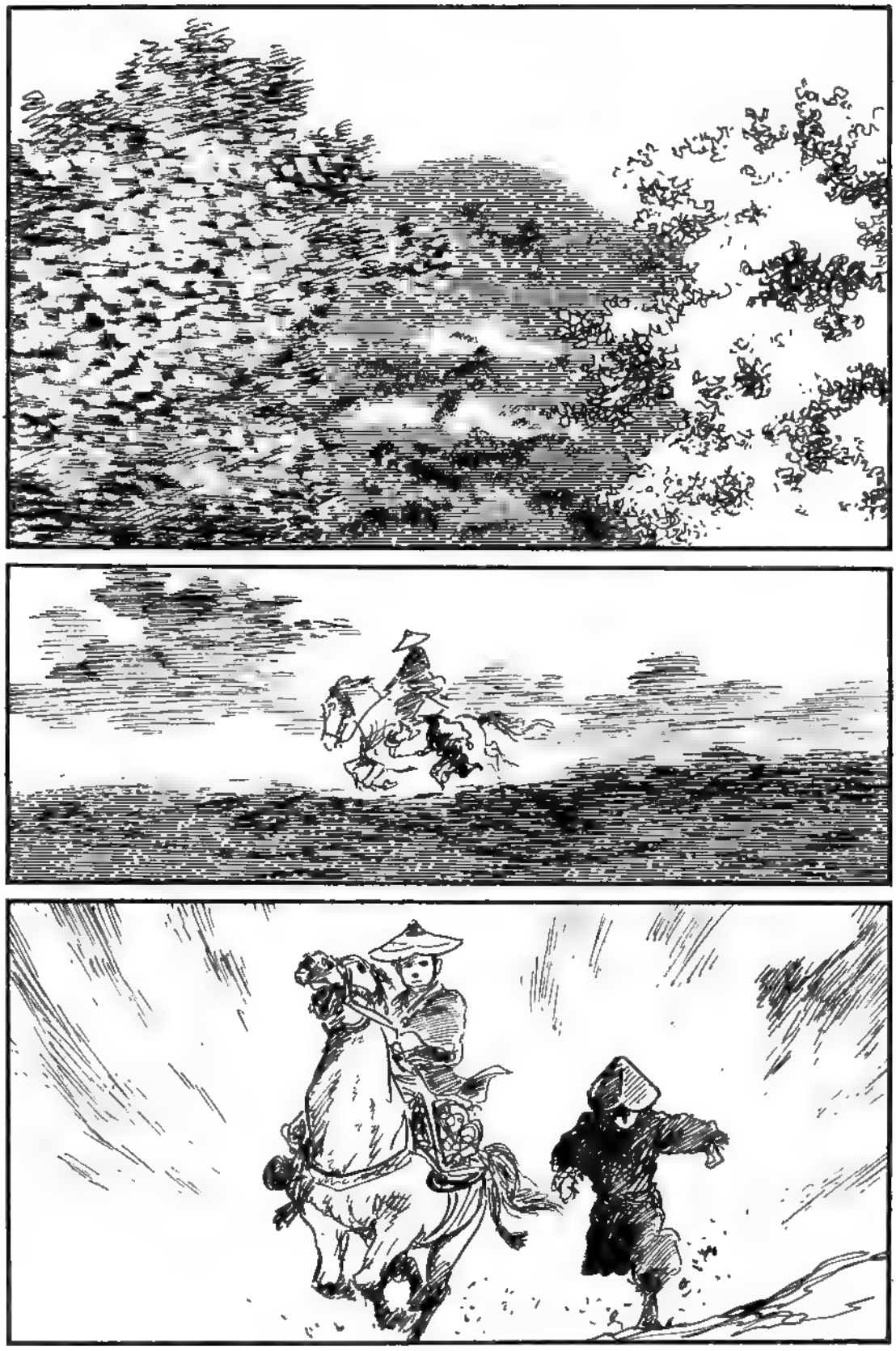
UH...
UH...
UH...
UH...

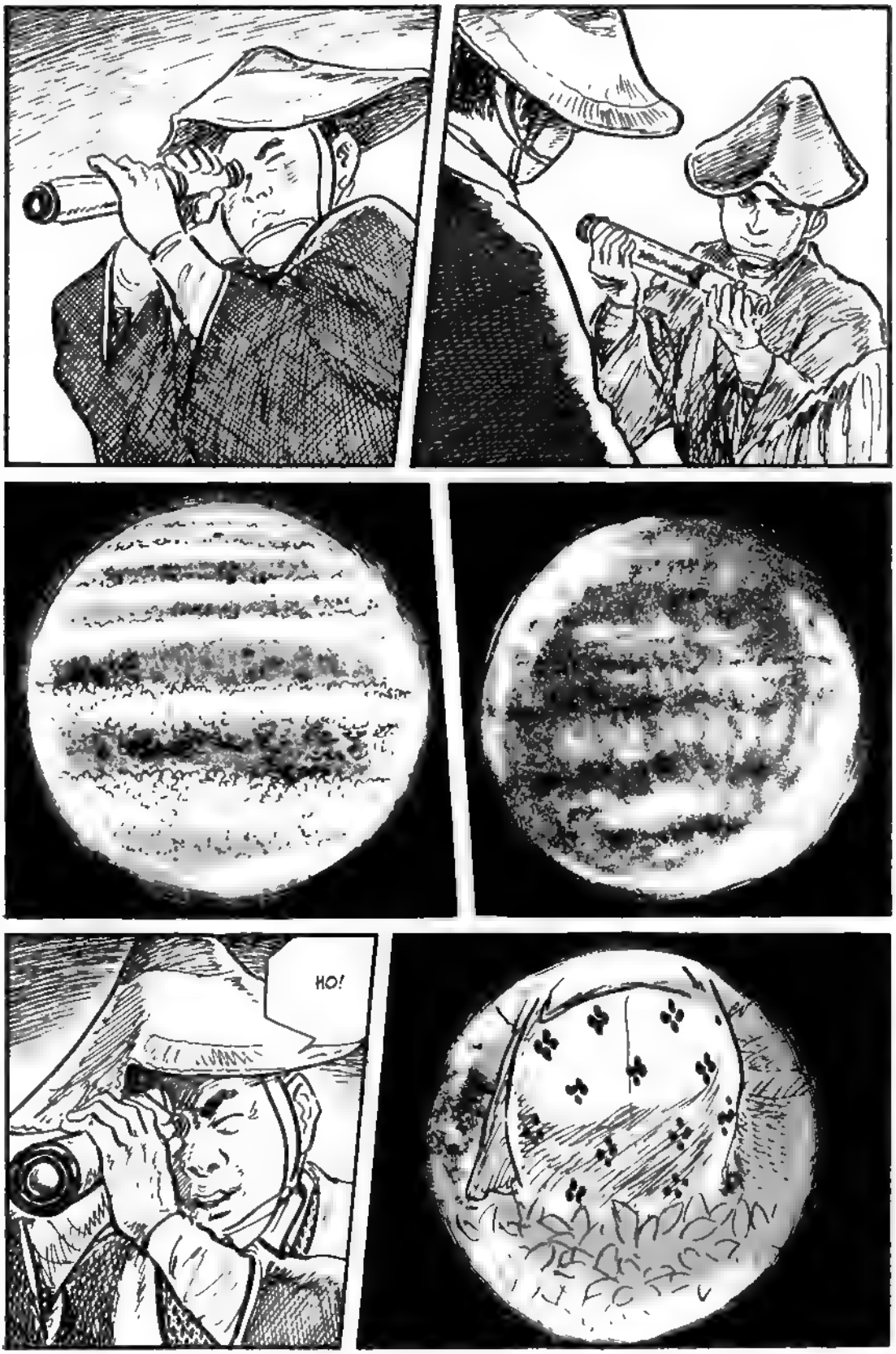

SHE'S USING... A YAM.
AAGHH
HANZŌ KNEW...
...HOW HIS MASTER WOULD ASSAIL HER AFTER THIS.
IT MADE HIM SAD.
IEYASU LAUNCHED THE FIRE ATTACK AGAINST HER, THOUGHT HANZŌ.
HANZŌ KNEW THE REASON WHY BY THAT TIME.
BUT SHE WAS SOMEONE HE COULD NOT FIND AGREEABLE.
IEYASU WAS WORKING TO LIGHT A BLAZE IN THE CORE OF HER BODY TO SET HER AFLAME.
ALTHOUGH SHE WAS HIS MASTER'S WIFE, HANZŌ DETESTED LADY TSUKIYAMA.

Chapter On Relinquishing Factions

No. 5: It Rains at Home, and it Rains on the Battlefield, Part 1



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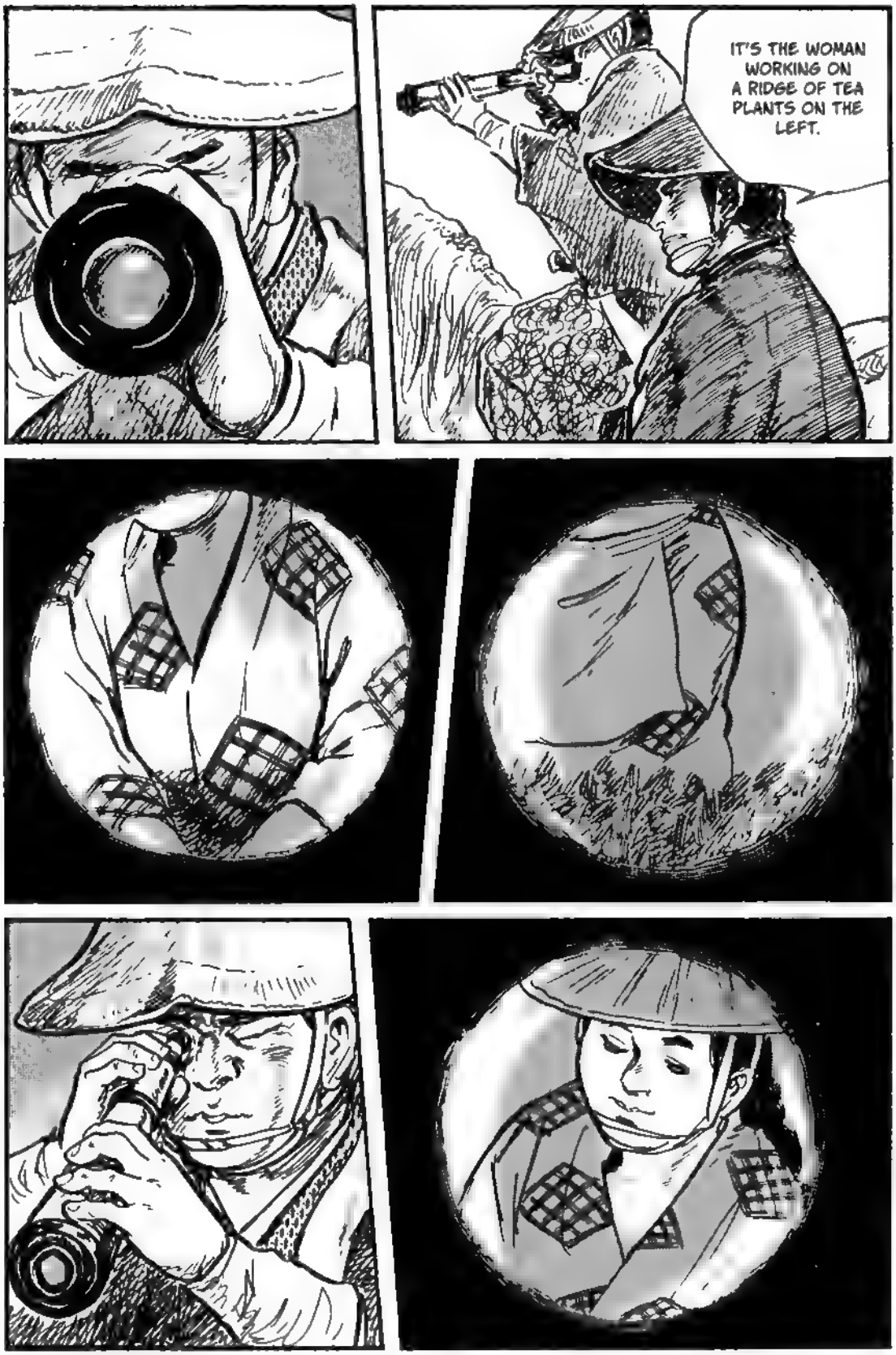

IT'S THE WOMAN WORKING ON A RIDGE OF TEA PLANTS ON THE LEFT.

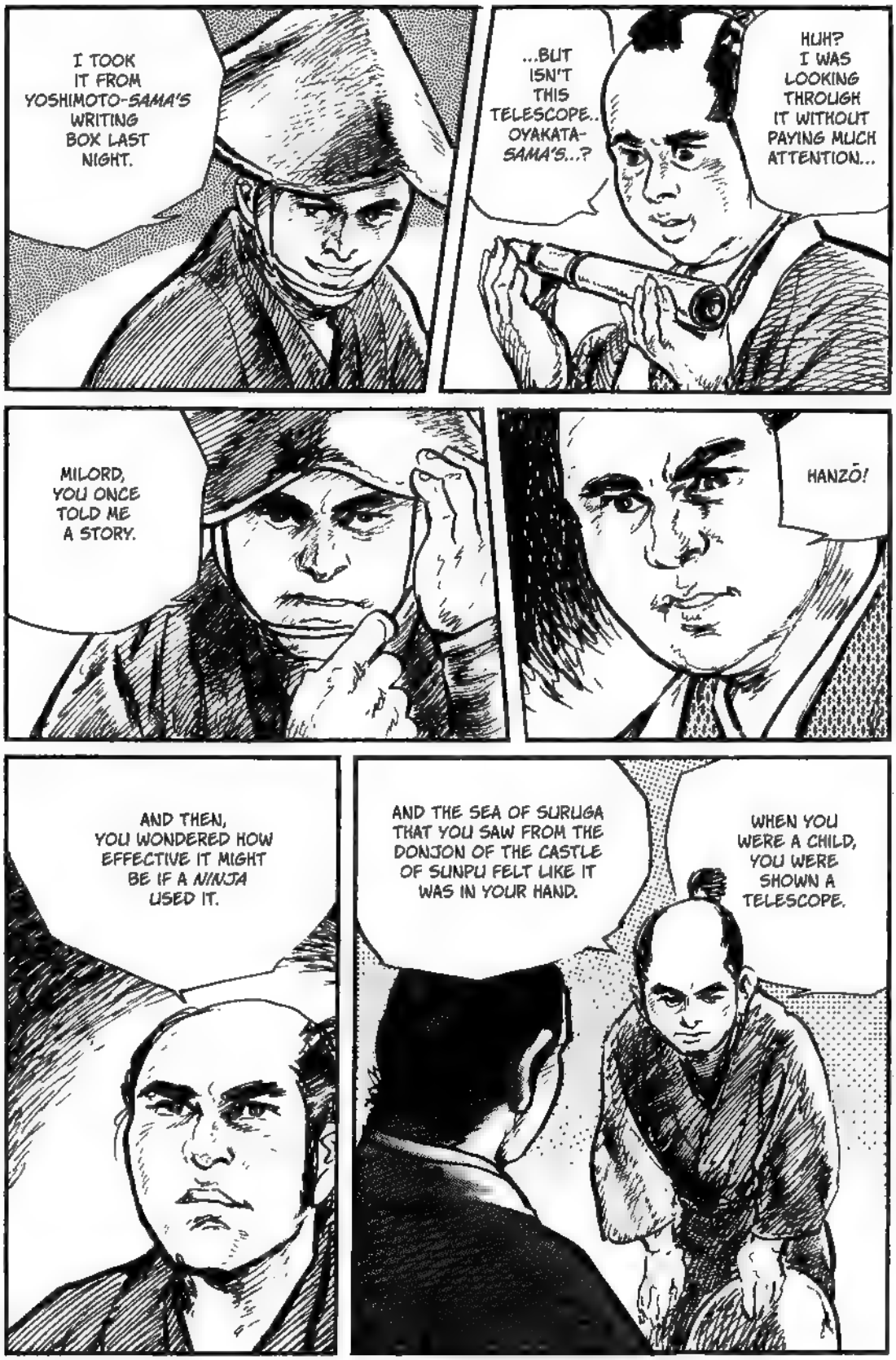
HM.
SHE IS DIFFERENT FROM MILADY IN EVERY WHICH WAY, MILORD.
SHE HAS CHARM, WHICH MILADY DEFINITELY LACKS.
SHE WOULDN'T BE CALLED UGLY, THOUGH.
HMPH.
SHE ALSO HAS NAIVETÉ.

MILORD, YOU SAID IT RAINS AT HOME.
HANZŌ, YOU DON'T LIKE MY WIFE, DO YOU?
HOME... EH?
HMM.
INDEED, HOME SHOULD BE A PLACE WHERE ONE FINDS PEACE AND SAFETY.
I LIKE A TYPE OF WOMAN WHO WOULD CARE THAT YOU COULD REST AT HOME-- WHERE YOU FIND A GRASSY BED IN SPRING, A COOL SHADE IN SUMMER, A SUNNY SPOT IN AUTUMN AND A FIREPLACE IN THE WINTER.

AND AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. IT'S ALSO FOR ALL OF YOU.
I NEVER HAD A HOME, AND THAT'S WHY I WANT IT EVEN MORE.
IT'S FOR THAT REASON.
MILORD, IT IS US, YOUR VASSALS, WHOSE DUTY IT IS TO BUILD SUCH HOME FOR YOU.
THAT'S RIGHT. FOR THAT REASON.
BECAUSE WE ARE WHO SERVE THE HOUSE.

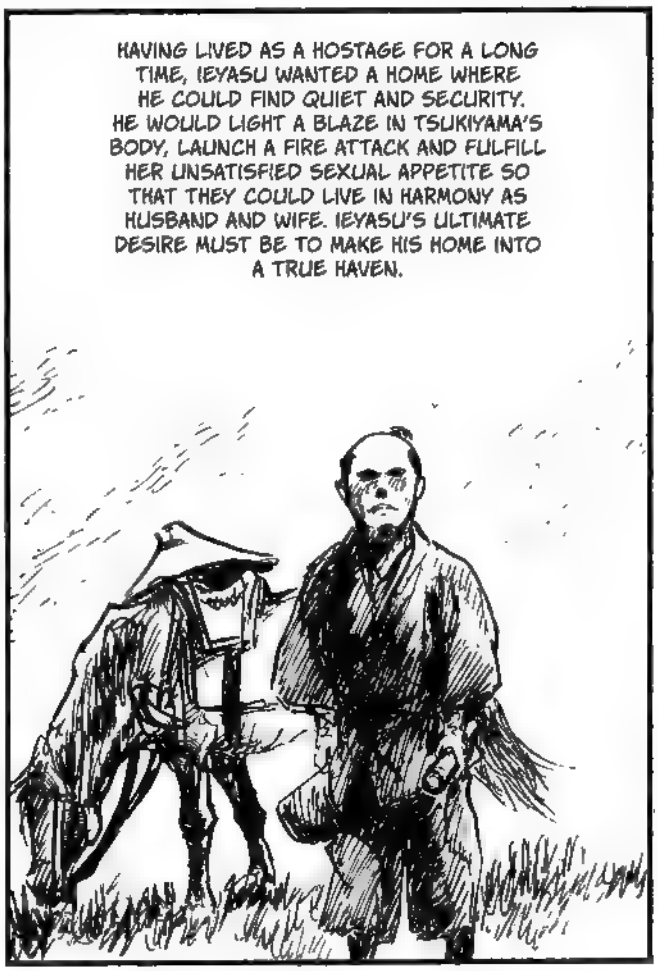
...THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT WAYS TO APPRECIATE TEA, BUT FROM WHAT I HEAR, THERE IS NO BETTER WAY THAN WRAPPING THE FIRST TEA OF THE SEASON IN A PIECE OF PAPER, TYING IT WITH STRING...
PLEASE TELL HER...
NOW, THERE IS A LOTUS POND AT AN ABODE IN SHŌSHŌMIYAMACHI. WILL YOU BRING OVER SOME NEWLY-PICKED TEA AND STEEP ONE FOR ME?
... PLACING IT INSIDE THE BUD OF A LOTUS FLOWER FOR A NIGHT AND TAKING IT OUT AT DAWN TO STEEP IT WITH THE DEW THAT'S GATHERED ON THE LOTUS LEAVES OVERNIGHT.
I SOUGHT MY FATHER'S ADVICE, AND HE TOLD ME.
I DIDN'T COME UP WITH THIS.
HMPH.
SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

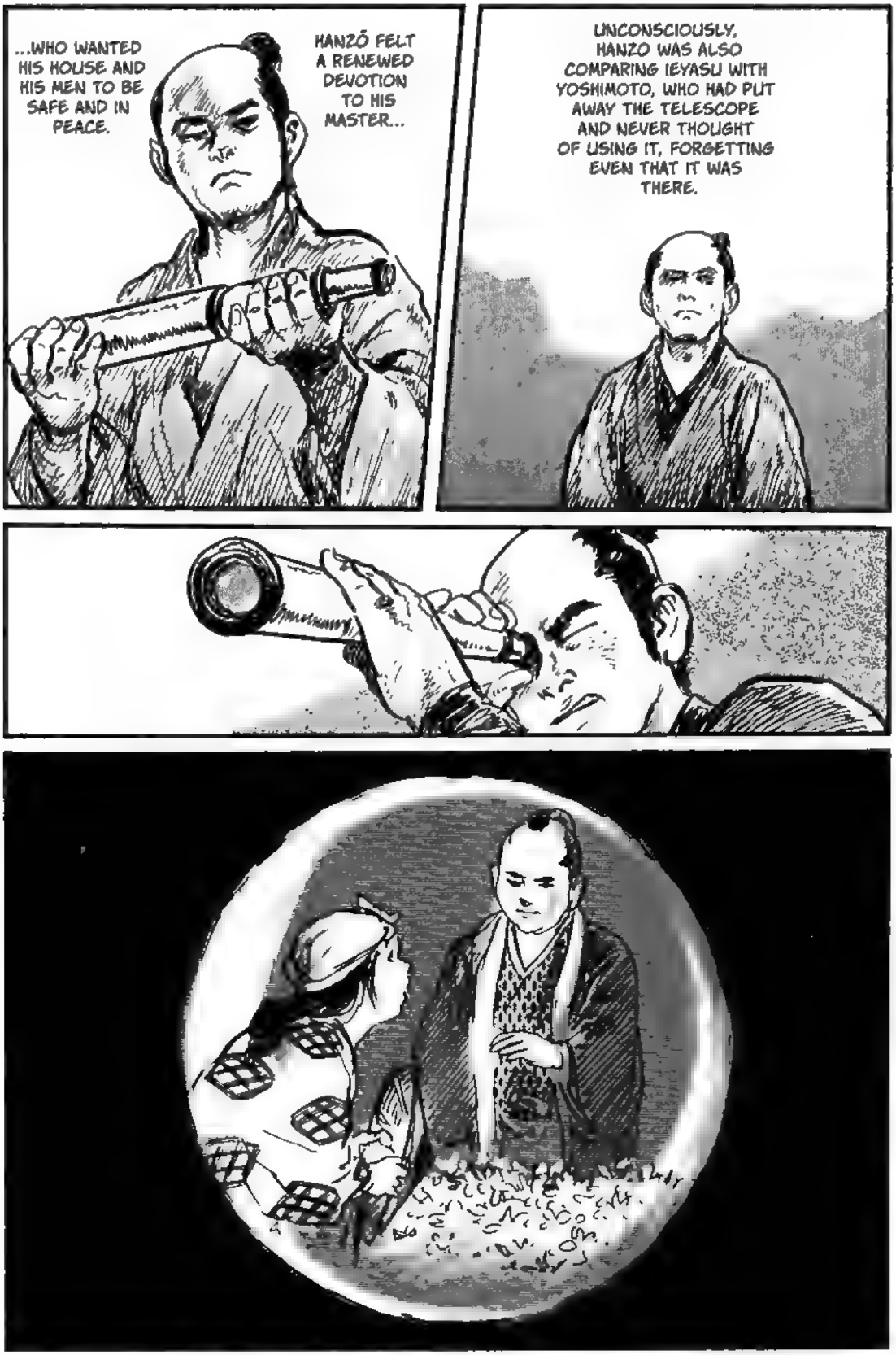
INDEED, IT MAKES ME FEEL ITCHY AROUND MY REAR.
IT'S EMBAR-RASSING.
LOTUS FLOWER... AND NEWLY-PICKED TEA, EH?
HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HM?!


I TOOK IT FROM YOSHIMOTO-SAMA'S WRITING BOX LAST NIGHT.
...BUT ISN'T THIS TELESCOPE... OYAKATA-SAMA'S...?
HUH? I WAS LOOKING THROUGH IT WITHOUT PAYING MUCH ATTENTION...
MILORD, YOU ONCE TOLD ME A STORY.
HANZŌ!
AND THEN, YOU WONDERED HOW EFFECTIVE IT MIGHT BE IF A NINJA USED IT.
AND THE SEA OF SURUGA THAT YOU SAW FROM THE DONJON OF THE CASTLE OF SUNPU FELT LIKE IT WAS IN YOUR HAND.
WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD, YOU WERE SHOWN A TELESCOPE.

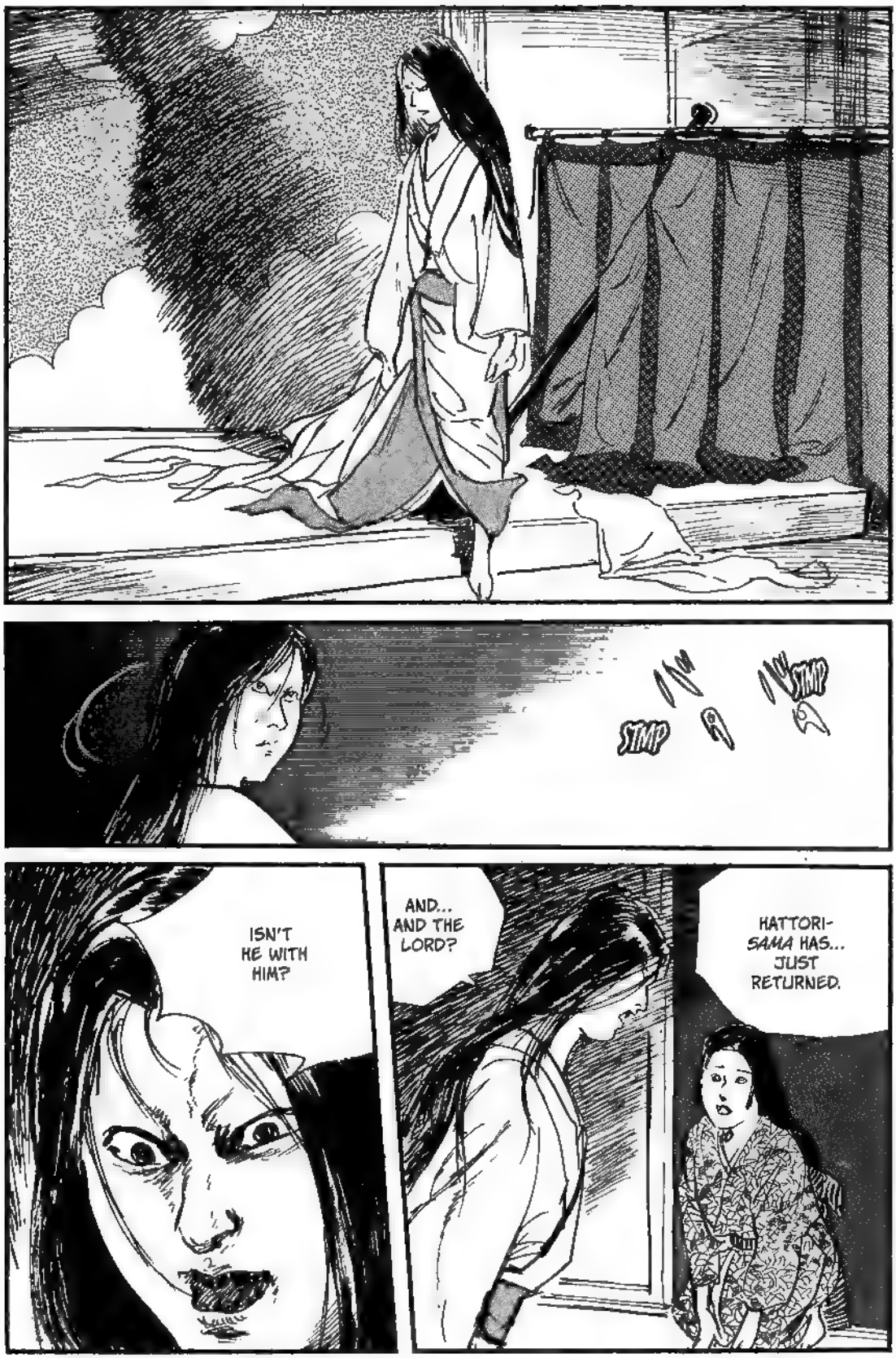
THAT'S WHAT I BELIEVE.
BUT IT IS ONLY VALUABLE WHEN A WARLORD MAKES USE OF IT.
THERE IS NO BETTER WEAPON TO DETECT THE MOVEMENT AND THE FORMATIONS OF AN ENEMY.
A TELESCOPE WILL HAVE AN IMMEASURABLE EFFECT IF IT IS USED IN BATTLE.
HEH HEH HEH. I'LL ACCEPT WITH GRATITUDE.
FOR YOU, MILORD.
...AND IF IT IS SOMETHING THAT ISN'T NOTICED EVEN WHEN IT IS TAKEN... I THOUGHT THERE WAS NO HARM IN BORROWING IT.
IF SUCH A TELESCOPE IS LEFT FORGOTTEN IN A WRITING BOX, COVERED IN DUST...

THIS WAS WHAT HANZŌ BELIEVED.


HAVING LIVED AS A HOSTAGE FOR A LONG TIME, IEYASU WANTED A HOME WHERE HE COULD FIND QUIET AND SECURITY. HE WOULD LIGHT A BLAZE IN TSUKIYAMA'S BODY, LAUNCH A FIRE ATTACK AND FULFILL HER UNSATISFIED SEXUAL APPETITE SO THAT THEY COULD LIVE IN HARMONY AS HUSBAND AND WIFE. IEYASU'S ULTIMATE DESIRE MUST BE TO MAKE HIS HOME INTO A TRUE HAVEN.


...WHO WANTED HIS HOUSE AND HIS MEN TO BE SAFE AND IN PEACE.
HANZŌ FELT A RENEWED DEVOTION TO HIS MASTER...
UNCONSCIOUSLY, HANZO WAS ALSO COMPARING IEYASU WITH YOSHIMOTO, WHO HAD PUT AWAY THE TELESCOPE AND NEVER THOUGHT OF USING IT, FORGETTING EVEN THAT IT WAS THERE.

ISN'T MY LORD BACK YET?!
SHRRRRIP
RIPP
WHERE ON EARTH IS HE WASTING TIME?
ARRGH.
RIP
RIP
AAAA


STMP
STMP
ISN'T HE WITH HIM?
AND... AND THE LORD?
HATTORI-SAMA HAS... JUST RETURNED.

MASANARI.
HE SHOULD BE BACK SOON
WHERE DID YOUR MASTER GO?!
YES, MA'AM.
HE IS AT SHŌSHŌMIYAMACHI.
I ASKED YOU WHERE HE WENT. DIDN'T YOU HEAR ME?!

YES.
I'M GOING COME WITH ME, MASANARI.
STAY WITH ME.
OTHERWISE, YOU'D GO AND TELL HIM RIGHT AWAY. I WILL NOT LET YOU.
YOU MUST NOT LEAVE MY SIDE.
UNDER-STAND?!
YES, MA'AM.

WITH WHAT KIND OF... A WOMAN WOULD HE...?

GLOSSARY

"aun no kokyu"
Literally means breathing in and out, but what it really refers to is a perfect, harmonious timing between two people.

daijuji
One of the major historical sites of Okazaki. Founded in 1475, Daijuji temple is most famous in Japanese history by its connection with Tokugawa Ieyasu.

dosha
Consists of kanji characters "do" (rage/anger) and "sha" (wheel/car).

Eiroku
Eiroku was a Japanese era name after Kōji and before Genki and spanned from 1558 to 1570.

he shou wu
The root of polygonum multiflorum thunb (chinese knotweed).

Hōjō
The late Hōjō clan was one of the most powerful warrior clans in Japan in the Sengoku period.

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Path of the Assassin*:
chan – for children, young women, and close friends
dono – archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures
san – the most common, used among equals or near-equals
sama – used for superiors
sensei – used for teachers, masters, respected entertainers, and politicians.

Inaba castle
Now known as Gifu castle, it is located on the summit of Mt. Kinka in Gifu.

jodai
A top-ranking samurai official placed in castles in service to a *daimyō* in feudal Japan.

Marici
The name of a Buddhist goddess representing an amalgamation of several Hindu antecedents, primarily the god Marici, who is considered to have been a son of Brahma or one of the ten patriarchs created by the first lawgiver Manu. The deity assumed female form on adoption into Buddhism. Since Marici means "light" or "mirage," Marici was regarded as a deification of mirages and being thus invisible or difficult to see was invoked in order to escape the notice of one's enemies. This martial aspect has been carried over in the cult of Marishiten in Japan, where she came to be revered as a tutelary deity of the warrior class.

Mino
Mino is an old province of Japan, which today composes nearly the entire southern part of Gifu prefecture.

Mōri clan
The Mōri clan was a family of *daimyō*, descended from Oe no Hiromoto and established in Aki province.

Nagao
The Nagao clan was a family of *daimyō*, feudal lords who built and controlled Kasugayama castle and the surrounding fief, in what is now Niigata prefecture.

neyasu
Ne = sleep. Yasu = peace and safety.

nokizaru
Female ninja.

okami
Refers to a man of authority such as emperor or lord/master.

Saito Dosan
(1494-1556) The epitome of the *daimyō* that dramatically rose and also fell from power in Sengoku period Japan. He is known as Mamushi of Mino (a type of poisonous snake) for his ruthless tactics.

Saito Yoshitatsu
(1527-1561) One of the sons of Saito Dosan, who is known as the serpent *daimyō*. Yoshitatsu was the feudal lord of Mino.

samehan
Same = awake/wakeful. *Han* is hanzō's *han*.

shōchū
Shōchū is a distilled alcoholic beverage which is traditionally produced in Japan.

Shogyo mujo, shoho muga, nehan jakujo.
All things are transient, everything is devoid of self, nirvana is tranquil.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi
(1536 – 1598) A Sengoku *daimyō* who unified Japan. He succeeded his former liege, Oda Nobunaga, and brought an end to the Sengoku period. He was also known for his invasion of Korea.

Watanabe Moritsuna
(1542-1620) Known as "Spear Honzo" due to his remarkable skills with the spear. Moritsuna served under Tokugawa Ieyasu since the year of 1577.

yasu
"Yasu" means peace and safety.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman,* Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku,* a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

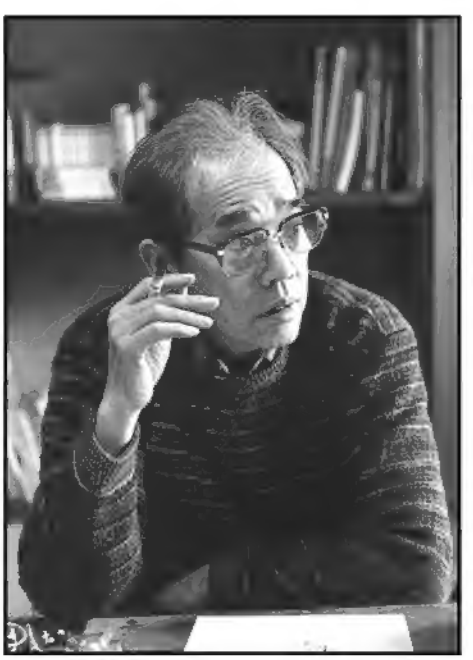
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami* (*Lone Wolf and Cub*). Many additional series would follow, including *Path of the Assassin* and *Samurai Executioner*.

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of seventy-one.



STOP! THIS IS THE BACK OF THE BOOK!

This manga collection is translated into English but oriented in right-to-left reading format at the creator's request, maintaining the artwork's visual orientation as originally published in Japan. If you've never read manga in this way before, take a look at the diagram below to give yourself an idea of how to go about it. Basically, you'll be starting in the upper right corner and will read each balloon and panel moving right to left. It may take some getting used to, but you should get the hang of it very quickly. Have fun!

2
ALSO, THERE IS NO TEAMING UP. YOU MUST ACT ALONE. IF THE OLDER BROTHER SUCCEEDS, THE YOUNGER BROTHER IS EXCLUSED. IF NOT, THE YOUNGER BROTHER WILL TRY WHAT THE OLDER BROTHER FAILED.
1
I SAID UNNOTICED. THAT MEANS YOU MUST NOT RAISE A RACKET.
4
STEAL IT QUIETLY AND QUICKLY.
3
LET ME REPEAT. YOU MUST NOT START A FIRE, HARM THE OWNER OR CAUSE A BIG FUSS.
6
YES, SIR.
NOW GO, YASUTOSHI.
5

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